

Ghost by LPLTVH

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Summary:

After some years dating together, Max and Jane are living a complicated moment.

Sequel of The New Girl. Don't hesitate to leave comments, I love reading comments :)

1. Roommates

Author's Note:

▲□Be careful, some sensitive subjects will be treated (in a more or less good way)▲□

It was dark outside. The girl was at her kitchen table, reading her book of recipes. There were two plates on the table, but she was alone. She spent the day at the restaurant, and all she was dreaming of was going to sleep, but she was waiting. She didn't know how many time, and especially why she was doing this, because she knew it was useless; it wouldn't change a thing.

The door opened and instantly slammed. The other girl quickly walked in front of the kitchen, slamming all the doors on her way, going straight to the corridor. The girl in the kitchen didn't even look up, knowing it was useless. So she kept waiting. She heard her taking her shower, going to her room, and all those kind of things she had been doing every night. The other girl finally reappeared, a file in her hands, and sat in front of her, taking a bite of her plate, reading her document.

- "So, that's it!? You don't even say hi!?" stated the redhead with an irritated tone.

The brunette didn't answer. She kept reading, giving some quick looks around her, but without watching her girlfriend. Max stood, making grate the chair. Jane brutally started, dropping her fork.

- "What the fuck!?" got angry the brunette.

- "Oh! You have a voice! I was worried you lost your vocal cords at work!"

- "You could prevent when you-"

- "When I what!? Decide to live!? Yeah, I'm sorry, I'm not here just to feed you! I've been waited for you for two hours, and you didn't think one second to call me!"

- "I never asked you to wait for me! If you're tired, just go to sleep and leave me alone!"

- "Yeah, I should have! I just wanted to spend some time with my girlfriend, but it's apparently just theoretical now!"

- "I've other things to do!"

- "Just saying hi and asking me how my day was would have killed you!?"

- "Fuck you Max! I'm working!"

- "Because I spent the day in the couch watching TV!?"

- "Leave me alone!"

Jane angrily stood, took her file and her plate, before going back in the corridor, slamming all the doors behind her.

Max sighed loudly with her mouth and sat again at her table. She was so exhausted. She spent two hours waiting, just to have another quarrel! She had hope every night that it would be different, but it wasn't! It was even worse! She found some courage and cleaned a bit the kitchen before going to the corridor. She arrived at the end of it, and opened the door on her right. Jane was at her desk, reading her file, with her plate next to her.

- "Goodnight," said Max.

Jane didn't answer. Max was even sure that she didn't hear her. She closed her door, feeling a violent pinch in her heart, and opened the door on her left, going in her bed. She stayed a moment looking at her ceiling, thinking too much to fall asleep. She wanted to cry, but she was empty, already crying every night. She was hating Jane for this, for making her feel so bad and so useless. She found some tears inside her eyes and let them fall; it was the only way for her to sleep.

- "NO! GET OFF OF ME! NOT AGAIN!"

Max quickly opened her eyes. She looked around, remembering where she was, and watched her alarm clock. It was only 2. The

redhead sighed with her mouth, before getting out of her bed and going in Jane's room. The brunette was in her bed, screaming and fighting with nothing.

- "(lights on) Jane! It's fine! You're at home! (sits next to her and grabs her head) Take a breath, Jane!"

- "DON'T FUCKING TOUCH ME!" got angry Jane, pushing away the girl.

- "Ok! Ok! I'm sorry! I just wanted you to calm down!"

- "I'M FUCKING CALM!"

- "Whatever! I bring you some water."

The redhead stood with a sigh and went to the kitchen to prepare a glass of water. She didn't come back immediately, needing a break. She put her head against the kitchen unit, looking at the glass in the sink under it. She took deep breathes, trying to not break down. She knew Jane wasn't acting like this on purpose, but it was exhausting. She turned her head, and saw the cat in his basket looking at her.

- "Hey Cat, she woke you up too? You don't have problems you, you're just a cat. Lucky you."

Max took the glass, crouched next to the cat to pet him, before going back to Jane's room. The brunette was sweating a lot, with a fast breathing, looking around with worried eyes.

- "It's fine Jane, take a breath."

- "I AM!"

- "And stop yelling!"

Max held out the glass and gave it to her girlfriend. Jane took it, but she was shaking so much that the water was falling on the bed. The redhead quickly grabbed it to stop the carnage. She took a tissue, wetted it, and gently wiped Jane's face.

- "Don't fucking touch me," told sharply Jane, staring into space.

- "I'm leaving," answered Max with a sad tone.

She put the glass on her nightstand and left the room without completely closing the door. She went in her bed and instantly fell asleep because of the tiredness.

2. Late

The waking up was hard. Max managed to open her eyes, but she didn't know how. She didn't even remember to have heard the alarm clock. She turned to watch it...

- "Shit!"

The redhead jumped out of her bed. She was late and wondered why her alarm clock didn't ring. She quickly put her clothes on, without taking a shower, barely brushed her hair, running everywhere in the apartment to rapidly get ready.

- "Shit! Shit, shit, shit, shit! Fuck you Jane! You couldn't wake me up before you leave!? Nooo! Of course not! Because I'm fucking invisible, with no interest! I'm not a fucking file to read! I'm just your goddamn girlfriend!"

While she was grumbling against no one, Max managed to finish to get ready. She ran to her car, put her keys on, and tried to start the car.

- "Come on, not now!"

The redhead insisted, and the car finally started. She was praying every day for the car to start, she didn't have enough money to buy another one, but with the cold winter they were having, it was harder and harder. She drove as fast as possible, but, with the snow, she preferred not pushing too hard to not provoke an accident. When she arrived, her coworkers didn't stint of remarking her late.

- "You needed a nap, dyke!?"

- "Told you, being a cook is too hard for weak girls."

- "You don't mind, but the real men began to work without you! We're not all pussies like you!"

- "Too busy eating her dirty girlfriend!"

She would have loved to. She ignored them, used to this kind of

remarks. And she knew they were just scared because she was the best in this kitchen, and the head chef knew it. He was supposed to give a promotion to one of them, and the only reason she couldn't have it was because she was a girl. She knew she wouldn't get it, but it was fine, she didn't need a promotion to show what she was capable of. When she had her own restaurant, people would run to her door to have a plate. She kept her dream in mind, it was her motivation, the reason she was continuing it.

- "Oh Max! You deign to come!" told the chef, going out of his office.

- "Yes, I'm sorry for my late, it won't happen again," apologized the redhead.

- "It's okay for this time, you arrived just in time for the rush hour."

Max nodded, relieved to not have more problems. The man returned in his office, enabling the other boys to look angrily at Max.

- "You suck his dick, we all know that!"

Max rolled her eyes. One moment they called her "dyke", and the moment after she was sucking dicks, what morons! She didn't wait a second and began to work. It was lunch time, which meant no time to breathe. No sooner had she finished a plate that she had to do two more! It lasted two hours until it got calmer. It was the half of the afternoon, so Max decided to take her break. She went behind the restaurant, in the street with the dumpsters, where the waitresses were smoking. As usual, she was joined by Gabrielle, to share their last troubles.

- "Hey," weakly smiled the black-haired girl.

- "Hey," sighed the redhead.

- "You didn't sleep a lot!"

- "Neither did you!"

- "Yeah...nightmare?"

- "At 2, as usual. You?"

- "No, not this time. He woke up because of his leg," pouted Gabrielle.
- "Right leg?"
- "Yep. It apparently hurt. But he didn't want me to help."
- "I know that. I tried to calm her, but she yelled and asked me to go away. With her sweet and loving tone, of course," explained Max with a sad irony.

Gabrielle had a sad and loud sigh with her nose, before sitting next to her friend on the edge of a condemned window.

- "When will you know if you have a promotion?"
- "Next week, but I know I won't."
- "Why not?"
- "I'm a girl. And I arrived late this morning," told Max.
- "You didn't wake up?" asked Gabrielle.
- "Nope. I didn't hear my alarm clock, and, as I don't exist for Jane, she didn't wake me up."
- "It's like living with ghosts."
- "No. We are the ghosts, trying to communicate with the barely living people, but they don't see us."
- "It's...sadly true. And worse than I thought."

Gabrielle put her head on Max's shoulder and began to play with her hand. She noticed a leather bracelet with a red stone at her wrist.

- "I thought you gave her back?" frowned the black-haired girl.
- "I did, but I took it back."
- "Why?"
- "I told her I would give her back when she came back. She

physically came back, but she is still stuck in there. She didn't even notice anyway," explained Max.

- "They will come back."

- "Yeah..."

The redhead tried to not lose hope, but they came back around three months ago, and for more than one month, everything changed, they became worse and worse.

- "I wanna smoke..." sighed Max.

- "You smoke!?" frowned Gabrielle who straightened.

- "No," lightly chuckled the redhead. "But, with all the stress, sometime I think of smoking, to relax."

- "Don't do that! If stress doesn't kill you, it will be the cigarettes!"

- "I know, I never said I was going to smoke, I just think of it, and maybe telling you will free me of this idea."

- "I hope!"

Max playfully rolled her eyes, but this idea began to become a bit obsessional. The waitresses were slowly coming back inside, meaning it was the end of Max's break. The two girls stood, and, while they were saying goodbye, a waitress stopped next to Max, warmly smiled to her, and blew some smoke on her face before going inside.

- "Who's that?" frowned Gabrielle.

- "Lisa," answered Max.

- "There is something between you and her!?"

- "No! Of course not! I would never do that to Jane! I don't know why she did that!"

- "Yeah, but you're still blushing."

The redhead put her hands on her cheeks, like if she could feel the

pink on it.

- "You're not supposed to go to work!?" stated Max with an irritated tone.

- "I will. Just be careful, I know it's tempting, but-"

- "But nothing. There is nothing between Lisa and I, that's all!"

- "Okay! Okay. I just wanted to be sure."

Gabrielle nodded. Max was exhausted, she wasn't surprised by her reaction, but she hoped she wouldn't do something stupid she would regret later. The two girls separated, both going back to their works.

3. Beard

It was the end of the day. The black-haired young woman was in direction of her apartment. She was feeling stupid because she was fearing it. She shouldn't, but it was stronger than her. She put her hand on the door knob but didn't open immediately. She took deep breathes, trying to convince her it was ridiculous, before slowly opening the door, trying to not make too much noises. The smell was stinging her eyes. He wasn't there. She closed the door, making noises, making start the couch. The black boy brutally woke up with a small scream, looking around with his shaking body.

- "Shit, I didn't see you!" told Gabrielle, running to him. "(places her hand on his cheeks) Breath, just breath, okay? It's just me, it's just me, Gabrielle! Your girlfriend!"

- "WHY DID YOU DO THAT!?" yelled Lucas.

- "It was an accident, I didn't see you!"

- "I DON'T GIVE A SHIT! I COULD HAVE DIED!"

- "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't want to scare you!" apologized quickly the black-haired girl with tears in her eyes.

- "GET OUT OF HERE!"

Gabrielle didn't insist and went in the kitchen. She broke down on the table, exhausted. She didn't like seeing him like that, she never knew what kind of reaction he could have. And his smell, he drank again, it was making him angrier. She didn't know what to do, in a month he totally changed. She asked him if he didn't want to see a professional to talk to, but he felt offended every time and got angry, so she gave up. She wiped her tears and managed to calm down. She prepared some food, two plates on a tray, and went back to the living-room. Lucas was now sitting, the blanket on his dirty, and messy hair, searching something to watch on the TV. She sat next to him, the tray between them.

- "You should shave your beard. It begins to be messy."

- "Later."

Gabrielle pinched her lips together and nodded. She tried every day to force him to take care of himself, but he always answered the same thing.

- "I'm not hungry," told Lucas.

- "Just a little bit, to be su—"

- "I. Am. Not. Hungry."

The black boy turned his head like to provoke her, but the girl didn't follow him in this. The girl took her plate on her lap, while Lucas opened another beer and drank it.

- "What did you do today?" asked shyly Gabrielle.

- "Uh...nothing..." answered Lucas, looking down at his lap, feeling ashamed.

- "It's fine. Maybe tomorrow, you could take a shower?"

- "Oh yeah!? And how I'm supposed to do that!?"

- "We have a bath, you can just lay down in it."

- "And how I get out!?"

- "I...I..."

- "Yeah, that's what I thought. I'm unable to do anything!"

- "That's not true! Many people can do many things, even with just one leg!"

- "But that's not me, okay!? Me, I'm just a loser, I'm not even able to just take a shower!" stated Lucas with a shaking voice, and tears in his eyes.

- "Oh, Sinclair..." sighed sadly Gabrielle.

She tried to put her hands on his cheeks, but the boy rejected her and

violently threw his beer on the wall in front of them, scaring her. The young boy let some tears fall on his cheeks, before taking support on his arms to move in the wheelchair next to him and leaving the room.

Gabrielle stayed a moment on the couch, her face hid behind her hands, like if he was still there. She didn't want to join him, she preferred staying alone. But she didn't like letting him alone, she didn't know what he could do. Her biggest fear was to find him dead, a bullet in his head. Every time she was leaving the apartment to go to work, she was thinking of him, alone, lost, depressing, and thinking he had no other choice. She finally went in their bed, trying to fall asleep, knowing he could scream during the night, because of the pain, or a nightmare.

She didn't know what happened to them, why they were like that now, but it was scary, she couldn't recognize any of them! They were not the same.

4. File

Someone could be behind. No one. Checked one more time. No! There was no one! It was stronger than her. Maybe on her left? No one. On her right? Just Moussa at his desk. It was too dangerous. She knew she should have stayed at her apartment. But the files. She needed to finish them. Maybe tomorrow. No, not tomorrow. Now.

The black and chubby man at her right looked at her struggling, feeling some pain in his heart. He had been friend with Jane since the police academy. She was the only girl, and he was the only black, the two most discriminated.

- "Jane? Is everything okay?" asked Moussa with his deep voice.

But the girl kept writing her file with her bandaged hand, giving looks around. He stood and sat on her desk.

- "You need a break."

- "I'm fine. I have to finish this."

- "You're shaking."

- "It's...coffee," told Jane, her eyes on her file.

- "We both know it's not only this."

- "I didn't ask you anything!" got angry the girl. "Just go back to your work, and leave me alone!"

- "Jane-"

- "SHUT UP! (stands angrily) SHUT UUUUP! (throws all her papers on the floor)"

The room remained silent, all watching Jane. The young girl had crazy eyes staring into space, her face red, her body tensed, and her breathing heavy and fast. The door of the captain slammed, making brutally start Jane, whose knees gave way. She began to gather her papers -hearing some of her colleagues laughing- but her vision was

blurry, her breathing irregular, and her members getting weak. They were laughing, louder, while she was unable to move, helpless. She heard people talking around her, but the laughs, the laughs were too loud, and the screams, buzzing her ears, giving her a head ache, it was too loud. Too loud. Hurting. Dark, humid, too small. Too loud.

- "Jane? Jane!" called Moussa.

He placed his arm on hers, bringing back the young girl. She had a start and brutally freed herself, before losing her balance, and falling on her butt, looking around. She was at the police station, but for a moment, she wasn't there.

Moussa was worried. Her eyes were wet and empty at the same time, her face was more than pale, and she was sweating a lot.

- "Are you okay?" asked the black man.

Jane looked around and saw the papers on the floor, so she kept collecting them, stood, and sat again at her desk, like if everything was fine.

- "Jane, stop it. It's late, I bring you home."

- "I didn't finish the file," answered the girl with a shaking and small voice.

Moussa sighed with his nose and picked up the rest of papers on the floor before putting them on her desk. Jane stopped writing. Instead of that, she moved slowly her head on her right, looking with too much insistence at her Glock 17. It would be so easy.

- "Officer Brown, take a break, and go back to your home," intervened the captain.

- "I...I..."

- "It's an order."

Jane opened her mouth to answer, but no words came out. She looked around, seeing all her colleagues watching her, some murmuring things. She stood, put her coat on, and grabbed her stuff

with her shaking hands. They were laughing, again. But it wasn't funny. She wasn't laughing. She was crying.

- "You're ready?" asked Moussa with a smile.

The brunette nodded, giving a last look to the others.

- "Come on. I'll drive you."

- "I, I can take the bus," answered Jane, watching around with worried eyes.

- "No, you can't, and you know that."

Moussa was going to put his hand on her arm, but he remembered that the girl was scared every time someone was touching her. The girl finally moved, followed by her friend. The ride was quiet. Moussa tried many times to begin a conversation with Jane, but the girl wasn't really there. Her eyes were glazed, empty, staring into space. She didn't stop fidgeting, with her legs shaking. He didn't know what was stressing her, and he was sure he would never know.

They arrived in front of her door. The girl didn't wait for him and quickly entered the apartment, like usual, ignoring Max who was in the kitchen. Moussa slowly entered, looking at the corridor door slamming, before turning his head to his left, seeing Max at the table.

- "Hey," told the redhead.

- "Hey," answered the black man.

- "How was she today?"

- "She had...a complicated day. She punched a suspect, and she just had like...a panic attack."

- "Oh...and you? How was your day?"

- "I'm tired," shrugged Moussa. "What about you?"

- "I arrived late, they mocked me, nothing original," pouted Max. "You wanna stay for dinner?"

- "No, it's already late, I have to go home."

- "Okay, thank you for bringing her back."

- "No problem, she is my friend. Bye."

- "Bye."

The two friends smiled to each other, and Moussa left the apartment. The day was not completely over for the man. On his road to home, he stopped at a fast food to order his dinner, before finally arriving. Like usual, the living-room was empty. He went directly to his room. He lightly knocked at his door, slowly opened it, and saw his girlfriend in bed.

- "Hey," smiled the man.

He sat next to her, and showed the food bag.

- "I bought burgers."

- "I'm not hungry," mumbled Bev, looking at the ceiling.

- "Did you eat today?"

- "I...I don't know..." sniffed the redhead.

- "Hey, it's fine, it's fine, don't worry. Maybe you could take a bite, like that you'll be sure you eat today, what do you think?" proposed softly Moussa.

- "I don't know..."

- "Okay, relax. Step by step. What about sitting?"

- "I...I can't..." cried Beverly.

- "Yes you can, just take your time."

Moussa managed to hold his tears. One person crying was enough. By her eyes, he could tell she cried the entire day, he wondered how she still had tears inside her. He tried to keep smiling, wanting to encourage her to do the same, but, for a month, he had never seen it

again. It seemed like years.

As the girl wasn't moving, he decided to help her. He gently took her hands, and raised her.

- "I'm just a burden..." said the redhead.

- "No, you're not. You're just in a complicated period, due to a difficult period. But you're not a burden, I'm here for you, and you'll be better," reassured the man.

- "It's my fault..."

- "No, it's not."

- "You weren't there, how could you know!?" stated Bev with an irritated tone. "Stop talking about things you don't know!"

- "Okay, okay, I'm sorry..."

Moussa wiped her cheeks with his big hands, before placing a soft kiss on her temple. Bev didn't react, like if she didn't care of his tenderness. He took off the food from the bag and placed it on the bed, holding out the French fries to her.

- "I'm not hungry," told Bev.

- "Just one," insisted Moussa.

The redhead sighed for a long time with her nose but took one. She chewed a long time before swallowing it with difficulties.

- "Another one?" proposed the black man.

Beverly shook her head to say no, but Moussa insisted, wanting her to eat more. She weakly took another one. It was silent, until Moussa began to tell her his day, without talking about Jane, knowing it was a bad idea.

5. Assessment

The sky was gray, scattered of clouds, with a pale sun. The snow was all melted, allowing every car to drive normally, but the temperature was still low. Gabrielle, Moussa, and Max were in a café on a table outside.

- "I thought you weren't supposed to smoke!?" grumbled Gabrielle.
- "Jane plus my job equal too much stress, so I smoke now," explained Max with an irritated tone.
- "Yeah, but now we have to stay outside in the cold!"
- "I know! I'm sorry."
- "It's fine, coffee will warm us up," reassured Moussa.

Max quickly shrugged, not really caring, while taking another puff. The waiter arrived with their hot drinks, warming Gabrielle's hands. The three took off papers from their bags with a pen, ready to take note.

- "So," began Moussa. "Who goes first?"
- "Bev, she is the less terrible," told Gabrielle.
- "Well, she was better last week, she got out of bed, took a shower, and wore clothes. She almost got out of the apartment, but the neighbor made a loud noise, scaring her. She froze, before having a panic attack. I brought her back in her bed, and she cried, and since this moment, she didn't get up."
- "She eats?" asked Max, taking notes.
- "I kinda force her, but when I'm not here, I'm not sure."
- "And her report?"
- "She doesn't wanna hear about it. It's on her desk, but it hasn't move since she came back. It's taboo."

- "Nothing else?" asked Gabrielle.
- "No, I mean, she doesn't move a lot."
- "And her temper?"
- "Got angry easily, but not for long. She cries a lot. But she took some meds against depression," explained Moussa.
- "Be careful with it, she could get addicted."
- "I'll keep an eye on it."
- "Yeah, count the pills when you leave, and when you come back," told Max.

The black man nodded and wrote it on his notebook.

- "Nothing else?" asked Gabrielle.
- "Nothing more than the last time," answered Moussa. "What about Lucas?"
- "He is...awful, but because he is sad and hurt. But, I can't stand his smell anymore! It stings my eyes! It's unbearably!"
- "Open your windows," said Max.
- "Oh yeah, thank you for this, I never thought of it, I'm so stupid!" answered ironically the black-haired girl with an upset tone.
- "Just sayin'!"
- "Okay girls, we don't need to fight against each other, we're all upset, we all have difficult lives at home, and that's why we're seeing each other, and why we need to stick together, okay?" intervened Moussa.
- "Sorry," pouted the two girls.
- "It's fine, we're all a bit tired and tensed."
- "Yeah...keep going," said Max.

- "Well, I don't know what to add. He is very violent, I mean, more than before. He is not hurting me, but I'm scared he would," confessed Gabrielle.

- "He still drinks?"

Gabrielle pinched her lips together and nodded.

- "Damn, maybe I'm the luckiest one!" told the redhead.

- "Really?" frowned Moussa.

- "At least Jane is not alcoholic, and she keeps going to work, she takes showers, and she eats! Okay, she is angry all the time, and when she is not, she is...lost in her head, stressed, scared, and all."

- "Is she violent?" asked Gabrielle.

- "With her words she is more than violent, and, physically, she is hurting herself, not me."

- "She is violent with people we arrest, the captain doesn't want her in patrol anymore, having too much complaints against her," added the man.

- "What does she do, then?" frowned Max.

- "She fills files, drinks coffee, and has panic attacks."

- "Fuck...well, we can conclude that they are mentally out!"

- "Max! This is rude!" stated Gabrielle.

- "I know, but it's true! Their brains melted! Jane had a panic attack because she smelled cigarettes!"

- "Maybe you should just stop smoking to not scare her more than she is!"

- "I'm trying! But it's hard!"

- "I know, I'm sorry...I didn't sleep last night, I'm tired..."

- "I understand..."

The three leaned back on their chairs, all sighed loudly with their mouths, exhausted.

- "Sex?" frowned Gabrielle.

- "Not now, we're in public, but maybe later," joked Max with a serious tone.

The black-haired girl pinched her lips together to contain her laugh, while Moussa giggled, making smile the redhead.

- "Well, I meant—"

- "I know what you meant," smiled Max. "And, to answer you, the most sexual interaction I had with Jane since she came back it's sitting in front of her at our kitchen table."

- "Wow, so erotic," lightly mocked Moussa.

- "I know! You're both envious of my platonic sexual life!"

- "Who wouldn't!?"

The three friends laughed. It had been a long time they hadn't laughed like that! With the ambience at home and at work, it was hard for them to take a break.

- "I stop trying," told Gabrielle. "He is a bit...weak from his part."

- "Yeah, kinda sucks!" said Max.

- "I tried that too," joked the black-haired girl.

- "Happy to know!"

- "To be honest, since he cried and yelled that he didn't want to hurt her, I didn't really try again. I don't want him to have other attacks."

- "Yeah...Jane still panicked when someone touches her," pouted the redhead.

- "Bev is less reluctant. She just, doesn't care! I prefer not forcing her, she feels bad enough, I don't want to pressure her, I just want her to feel safe with me," said Moussa.

- "Yeah...that's what we all want..."

And the fun was over. The three friends got lost in their thoughts. Max couldn't remember when the last time she had a real and normal conversation with Jane was. The first weeks she was fine, but one day, she began to stress, ignoring her, and getting angry for nothing, just like that.

- "Max, your girlfriend is here," frowned Gabrielle.

The redhead and the black man frowned too, before looking behind them. The brunette was wandering through the people, her arms on her, like if she was trying to hide her body, and looking around with a worried expression.

- "Jane!? What are you doing here!?" asked Max.

- "Jane? Are you okay?" told Moussa.

- "I, I took the bus..." answered the girl, avoiding eyes contact.

- "But why!? You don't work today!" stated the redhead.

- "I KNOW! I FUCKING KNOW! STOP TREATING ME LIKE A CHILD!"

Jane's yells caught everyone's attention, all preferring looking at her than continuing what they were doing.

- "I needed a file. That's all. (looks Moussa) Can you drive me home!?"

- "Yeah Moussa, drive her home! It's not like if we were living together! Oh but wait! We are!" stated angrily Max with a bit irony.

Moussa pouted to apologize, but the redhead made a movement with her head to tell him it wasn't his fault. The man stood, took his coat, put some dollars on the table, and walked away with his friend, letting the two girls alone.

- "You think they still love us?" asked Max.
- "I...I don't know...I don't think they feel love anymore..." answered Gabrielle.
- "Yeah...I'm sure she doesn't love me anymore. She barely knows who I am."
- "Don't say that. You know it's not that."
- "No, no, I don't know! Because we can't afford them real help! Because I didn't have this damn promotion which could have paid some hours with a psychologist for Jane, or a therapy! Because you and Moussa are working for two, and can barely pay for the apartment, the electricity, the water, the gas, the car, the food, and everything you need to live! And you, you're saving for his prosthesis! We don't know what they think because we don't know what to do!"
- "I, I know...I tried to convince my boss to let me have them for free, but he doesn't want, and it's hard to make a real analysis on people you're friends with...but..."
- "But what!? You think you know!?"
- "I think, I have an idea, I mean, it's pretty common for people who lived things like them."
- "So?"
- "PTSD. The symptoms match, I'm practically sure."
- "Then that's great! What do we have to do!?" asked quickly Max.
- "Therapy is the best option, with a treatment, but I read that sometimes, with time it gets better, but I don't really believe in this option," answered Gabrielle.

Max pouted. She saw no solution to this. This situation was so complicated, they knew what to do, but they couldn't afford it.

The ride was quiet. Moussa put the radio on, listening to the latest

music, while Jane was looking outside, nibbling her right thumb with tears in her eyes. The presenter was introducing the last song of Nirvana when Jane started and turned off the radio. She went back in her first position, a tear falling on her cheek.

- "Jane?"

- "I'm not crazy."

- "I know, I know, I never said that. I just wanna know what happened."

- "Nothing," answered Jane with a higher voice than usual because of her tightened throat.

- "How did you find us?" asked Moussa with a concerned tone.

- "I didn't! Okay!? I...I got lost...I didn't know where I was, it doesn't make sense! I know New-York by heart, but I didn't know where I was! I'm so stupid, I'm a fucking piece of shit..."

Jane let go her tears, putting her feet on her seat, wrapping her arms around her knees, and hiding her face inside, crying. Moussa put his hand on her shoulder to comfort her, but the girl made a brutal movement to free herself.

- "Don't touch me!" cried Jane before hiding her face again.

- "I'm sorry, I didn't want...I'm sorry..." told quickly Moussa.

The man put his hand back on the wheel without daring to watch his friend. Seeing her like that...it wasn't her. The Jane he met wasn't losing her mind like this one. She was making jokes, laughing, showing love to her girlfriend. But now...she was just empty.

6. Shower

The alarm clock woke Max up. The redhead grumbled in her pillow, before brutally hitting the object to stop it. She was so tired, but, at least, Jane didn't have a nightmare this night. The redhead was sure it was because she didn't sleep at all. Since she got lost in New-York last time, she had something like a breakdown and didn't leave the apartment, barely leaving her own room.

She found some courage and got out of her bed. She went to her bathroom and took a shower. It was only when she finished hers that she realized that someone else was taking a shower in the other bathroom. It was, obviously, Jane, but she was so weak those last days that she thought it was weird. Or maybe she was feeling better, but the redhead didn't believe a second of this supposition. She quickly put her clothes on and went in front of Jane's bathroom door. She softly knocked, before slowly opening it. Jane was under the shower, her clothes on, staring into space.

- "Jane? Are you okay?" frowned Max, slowly approaching.

The redhead got no answer. She crouched next to her and noticed her shadows under her eyes, her cadaver-like face, and her body shaking like if she was cold. She put her hand on her forehead. It was burning, but the water was icy. Jane didn't even react when Max touched her, meaning she was really feeling bad.

- "You're sick," stated the redhead. "Why didn't you come to me?"

- "It hurts," said Jane with a small voice, still staring into space.

- "What hurts?"

- "Everything hurts. But it burns."

- "Your forehead? Yeah, you have fever, it's normal, don't worry, a few meds and-"

- "No! Not my forehead!" got irritated Jane.

- "What then? Tell me, you know you can trust me."

As Jane was lifeless, Max took the opportunity to put her hands on her girlfriend's cheeks. But Jane had a rise of energy and pushed her, making her fall on her butt. Max was tired of these reactions. She stood, turned off the shower, and grabbed Jane by her arm, forcing her to get up. The other girl didn't fight, too exhausted. The redhead tried to dry her the best she could, before calling her boss to tell him she wouldn't come and calling a nurse to check Jane. She tried to move Jane from her bathroom, but the girl was a total wreck, so she let her there.

The nurse arrived in the middle of the afternoon. Max greeted her, and took her to Jane, explaining her the situation. The redhead didn't stay with them and not only because Jane didn't want but because she was a bit mad at Jane for acting like that. She knew it wasn't her fault, but staying alone in the shower whereas Max could have helped her was stupid! Anyway, she prepared a tea and took a break on the couch. She decided to read a magazine about skateboard. It had been a long time she didn't skateboard, with her study, then her work, and now Jane, she didn't really have time for herself.

After two hours, the nurse finally reappeared. Max jumped from the chair of the kitchen to talk to her.

- "So?" asked Max.

- "She has an infected wound in her back. She needs to see a doctor to have an excision," explained the woman.

- "An excision?"

- "Yes, to cut the diseased tissue. I cleaned the wound and placed a bandage. It has to be changed every day, I can come back if you want, or you can do it yourself."

- "I'm not sure she will let me...You can't do the excision yourself?"

- "No, I'm not entitled to do this. I can give you names of dermatologist surgeons," told the nurse.

- "Yes, yes, I would like to, thank you," answered Max, a bit lost in her thoughts.

While the nurse was giving Max a list of names, the redhead was filling a check for the woman.

- "PTSD, right?" stated the nurse.

- "Yeah," sighed Max.

- "I have many patients with it. You never thought of a therapy?"

- "No, I prefer letting her suffering in her shit!" told ironically Max with irritation.

- "Sorry, I didn't want to upset you."

- "It's fine, it's fine, I'm just tired. I can't pay her a therapy, I don't even know where there is one! Even if I knew, she wouldn't go in there..."

- "It will be okay," softly smile the woman. "What happened to her? If it's not too intrusive, of course."

- "She went in Somalia, with the army. Two of my best friends went too, they are in the same state as her."

- "I'm sorry to hear that. The army doesn't propose a psychological aftercare?"

- "No! They just broke them! After that, we have to deal with it!"

- "At least she is not alone, it's important for her mental health, even if she doesn't seem fine, she would be in a worse state if you weren't there with her."

- "Yeah, yeah..."

- "Well, I come back tomorrow for her bandage."

- "Yes, thank you a lot."

Max didn't know how Jane could be in a worse state. But maybe it was true, maybe she wasn't doing all of this for nothing. The nurse gave her a list of meds Jane could take without a prescription, before

leaving. Max went to the bathroom to see how her girlfriend was. Jane was sitting against the wall, her body still shaking, but a bit more awake.

- "Jane?"

The girl lightly started, like if she was coming back to herself.

- "How do you feel?" asked softly the redhead, slowly approaching.

- "Uh...better...I guess..." answered Jane with a shaking voice.

- "Good, the nurse comes back tomorrow to change the bandage."

- "I know."

- "Okay..."

Max stayed a moment at the door, looking at Jane scared on the tiles. She didn't know if she should talk to her about the doctor, the therapy, and all those kinds of things right now. Seeing the nurse was already a step for her, and she seemed really exhausted. She left her alone, but not for long. She came back with chocolate bars and sat next to her, giving her one. Jane took it, opened it with difficulties, and ate it automatically, not knowing if she was hungry or not.

- "I love you," told Max.

- "I know," answered Jane with a small voice.

Max pouted. She wasn't expecting Jane to answer her in another way, but, at least, she knew she was loved and had someone she could count on.

When Jane finished her chocolate bar, she stood, and went back in her room to lay down in her bed. Max's nerves were exhausted, so she decided to take a nap, knowing that Jane wasn't asleep.

7. Prothesis

- "You're ready?"

Gabrielle lightly knocked at the door before opening it. Lucas was sitting in his wheelchair, watching through the window.

- "You're still not ready!?" stated Gabrielle.

- "For what!? I don't wanna go!" replied Lucas.

- "It's important! It's for you!"

- "But I didn't ask you anything! I don't wanna go, it's my choice, respect it! Why would you want to help me by the way!? I'm just a goddamn burden! Why would you want to live with someone unable to live correctly alone!? Dependent on you!? Leave me alone!"

Lucas grabbed the lamp on his nightstand and threw it to Gabrielle who managed to close the door before it could hit her. She heard the object exploding and didn't dare to open the door again. She stayed a moment behind it, frozen, terrified by her own boyfriend. She felt the tears coming and decided to call someone. Thankfully, this person was free.

- "I'm sorry to bother you in your free day," apologized Gabrielle, while letting the other person entering.

- "You're not bothering me Gab, don't worry," reassured Max. "So, where is the problem?"

- "In his room, we have an appointment for a prosthesis in two hours, but I knew it would be difficult so I began to tell him to get ready an hour ago."

- "And he didn't, obviously. I'll talk to him."

- "Thank you."

Max gave a comforting tap on her shoulder before going straight to his room. She opened the door without knocking and without saying

a word.

- "What the fuck!? Why are you here!?" grumbled Lucas.

- "Because you're awful, and your girlfriend is tired!" told sharply Max, behind his wheelchair. "So? You don't wanna wear real clothes!?"

- "What!? Get out of here!"

- "I guess it's a no, so (leans the wheelchair and turns it in direction of the door) let's go!"

- "What!? No! Let me go! LET ME GO!"

- "Yeah, yeah, whatever! Keep screaming, and I handcuff you!"

- "You can't do that!"

- "You think I give a shit!? You really don't know me, dumbass!"

The redhead kept rolling him to the living-room where Gabrielle was waiting. The black-haired woman was surprised and impressed by Max's strength. She managed to contain her laugh and opened her door. Max kept walking with her friend until the elevator, followed by Gabrielle. Once in front of the car, Lucas kept fighting to not go.

- "Come on Lucas, stop acting like a child!" said firmly Max.

- "Shut up! You've nothing to do here! I don't wanna sit in this car!"

- "Oh, maybe you wanna drive!?"

- "Haha, so funny! I've no leg!" stated Lucas.

- "That's exactly why you're going to the hospital! To have another one!"

- "For what!? Nothing will be like before!"

- "Fine! You act like a child, you'll sit at the child place!"

Max opened the back door car and placed her arms under his

shoulders, raising him from his wheelchair. Lucas was trying to fight, but Max was stronger than him and forced him to go in the car.

- "FUCK YOU!" yelled Lucas with tears in his eyes.

- "Look, I know this is hard! Losing a leg is certainly one of the worst things that could happen to someone, but this is not our fault, okay? It's not Gabrielle who cut your leg, and it's not me either! We're both trying to help you, but you keep rejecting us! And guess what!? It's not working!"

Max slammed the door and sat in the passenger seat next to Gabrielle. Lucas felt the anger growing inside him. He tried to kick the car door, not to open it but to evacuate his frustration. Once calmed down, the boy began to let drop some tears, while Gabrielle was putting his seat belt. When she faced again the road, she had tears in her eyes. Max noticed and put a comforting hand on hers with a warm smile. The black-haired girl smiled too. She wasn't alone in this, it was reassuring to know that someone could understand what she was living, but who could understand what he was living? She didn't know. She started the car and began to drive.

- "For our next song, our radio proposed you the last controversy sang by Nirvana..."

- "Stop this fucking radio," ordered Lucas with his arms crossed.

Max sighed but turned it off. She didn't want to annoy him more, she already forced him to get out of the apartment, which was a complicated thing for them right now.

- "How is Jane?" asked Gabrielle with her voice down.

The redhead looked behind, checking if Lucas was listening, before facing again the road.

- "Not very good. She let a wound getting infected, and I'm scared that it was on purpose..."

- "Like, a suicide!?"

- "I...I hope not...I'm really worried, letting her alone an entire day is

stressing me more than going to work. I'm scared to come back home and..."

- "I understand, more than you think."

Gabrielle gave a quick look in the rear-view mirror to check her boyfriend. He was stressing a lot, looking around like if death was waiting for him, with big drops of sweat flowing on his temple.

- "We're almost there, breath slowly, okay?" told calmly Gabrielle.

But the boy didn't hear her. It was so dark, he couldn't see the others. It was...humid, and cold. Narrow. Too narrow. And her screams...hopeless, asking for help, knowing no one could.

- "Sinclair?"

The boy started and turned his head to his right, seeing Gabrielle next to the car with the door opened. He looked around and noticed they were at the hospital, Max was even waiting with a wheelchair.

- "Are you okay?" asked his girlfriend with a concerned tone.

Lucas looked at her with wide opened eyes and a cold sweat, breathing heavily.

- "I told you I didn't wanna go there!" got angry the boy.

- "You wanna go back!?" intervened Max. "After this long way!? You don't realize how much you just did!? You did the worst part! Now, all you have to do is to let us drive you inside, trying prosthesis, before going back to your home! Giving up now would be a shame, and you'll hate you for this."

- "I already hate me," stated Lucas between his teeth.

- "Then, try to hate you a bit less, and do something that you can be proud of."

- "Proud of what!? Going to hospital!? So fucking proud!"

- "Well, you don't really have the choice, you come with us, or you go

back to your home. On foot."

Lucas killed her with his eyes, but the redhead maintained the look, crossing her arms. After a moment, the boy gave in. He took support on his arms to move from the car to the wheelchair. They waited ten minutes before the appointment. Max let them go alone, staying in the waiting room. After around an hour, they finally reappeared. Lucas refused to answer the doctor's questions, to try the prosthetic legs (throwing them through the room), and to fill the papers. They gave him some meds to calm him down, placing some prosthesis on his leg. He finally chose one, and now, he needed to do re-education. Gabrielle didn't know how she was going to pay all of this, she would have to work more. The black-haired girl drove Max to her apartment, thanking her again and again, before going back with her boyfriend. Even if he didn't appreciate it, she was still very proud of him.

8. Reunion

Weeks passed, and the three traumatized were still unbearable, stuck in a rollercoaster between sadness and anger. Jane surprisingly went back to work, relieving a bit Max. Like that, she was sure she wasn't alone, Moussa keeping an eye on her.

But today it was the 5th year reunion of their high school in Hawkins. All of them took a hotel chamber, happy to have their lovers with them. They were so proud of them, Hawkins was far from New-York, it was a big step. Maybe they wanted to see again all this people they didn't like in high school!

Max was in the bathroom, getting ready. She was glad Jane didn't break the mirror, it was certainly because the redhead was always sure to cover it before she went inside. She wondered why the high school organized a 5th year reunion. First, because it wasn't the right year, it should have been the year before, and second because it was usually for the 10th year. Hawkins High School was certainly the only school doing this. She put Jane's leather bracelet around her wrist and joined her girlfriend in the room. Jane was standing at the window, like to be sure no one was going to attack her.

- "Um...you're ready?" asked Max.

- "Yes," answered Jane still looking outside.

- "Are you okay?"

- "Yeah, yeah..."

- "If you prefer staying here, I understand."

- "I'm fine!" got irritated Jane.

- "Okay, let's go then."

Jane sighed loudly with her nose before finally moving. They took their coats and bags and went to their car. It was Max who was driving, not only because she didn't trust Jane at it, but because...well, it was especially because she didn't trust Jane behind

a wheel. She didn't put the radio on, knowing Jane would put it off, as usual. The ride was quiet, none of the girls said a word. At least, Jane wasn't grumbling, it was like vacation for the redhead!

They arrived on the parking lot of the gymnasium. Nothing changed; it was a bit sad. A senior year welcomed them, giving them their badges after checking their identities. Max wondered if there were people going to school reunion where they were not invited. It was creepy and weird.

As soon as they entered, Max wanted to run away. She didn't like people in there, majority of them participated of bullying, especially with Jane. But anyway, they were there, so she was going to try to have fun! She entered and tried to look for faces she knew. When she was about to tell Jane who she just saw, she noticed that she was already gone. Fine, she would go alone.

- "Hey Max!"

- "Hey Dustin!"

The two friends hugged each other, happy to finally see each other.

- "It's been a while!" stated the man.

- "Indeed! Last summer, right?"

- "Yes, it was so cool! Jane is not here?"

- "She is here, somewhere, she was just behind me, and she just disappeared!"

- "Oh...she is still..?"

- "Worse! Anyway, how is Suzy?"

- "She is good, she didn't come, you know, six months is a lot, she is exhausted!" explained Dustin with a smile.

- "Yeah, I understand, it's fine," told Max.

The two friends kept talking about their lives. A bit farther, Moussa

and Beverly were arriving. They had to take the bus, because their car broke down just before they left. It was a big ordeal for the redhead, but she still made it, and Moussa couldn't be prouder. The man gently grabbed her hand, lightly rubbing the back of it, wanting to relax her. She was looking around, like if a danger could jump on her.

- "It's okay, Bev, I'm here to protect you," reassured Moussa.
- "You can't protect people from everything," stated the redhead.
- "If I can protect you, I'll be the happiest man alive."
- "Good for you."

Moussa lost his smile. Even if he was used to having those kind of sharp answers, it was still breaking his heart. He saw Max and Dustin talking and took the opportunity.

- "Hey!" greeted happily Dustin. "How are you?"
- "We're good," smiled Moussa.
- "Hey Bev, it's been a while! You're good?"
- "Yeah..."
- "Last time I saw you was certainly last year, for the New Year, before—"
- "I know," cut sharply the redhead.

Dustin pinched his lips together, thinking he put his foot in it. Max and Moussa shared a sad look, while Beverly was still watching around and shaking. She let go Moussa's hand and walked away. The man didn't follow her.

- "We took the bus," told Moussa.
- "Oh, why?" frowned Max.
- "The car broke down."

- "Shit, how are you gonna go back to your hotel!?"
- "Bus again!"
- "No way, I'll drive both of you."
- "..."
- "What?"
- "You really wanna have Jane and Bev in the same car?" asked Moussa.
- "It will be fine and maybe we'll learn more about this thing that happened to them!" answered Max.
- "It's just, if we could avoid two panic attacks..."
- "I know! But, I don't think Bev is able to take the bus twice in the same month!"
- "They still didn't tell you?" intervened Dustin.
- "No, they're graves," said Moussa.
- "The more time passes, the less they talk!" added Max.
- "Damn, 'must be hard!" stated the curly-haired boy.

Moussa and Max pouted, raised their eyebrows, and nodded. They saw Will arriving and decided to talk to him.

- "Yo Will!" greeted Max.
- "Hey! How are you all?" smiled the young man.
- "We're good! And who is this handsome man with you?" smirked Dustin.
- "Oh, uh, this is James, my boyfriend."
- "Nice to meet you," told the boyfriend.

- "Same for all of us!" answered quickly the curly-haired boy, taking his hand to shake it.

- "You're certainly Dustin."

- "Let him go, you're gonna break his arm!" intervened Max, separating the two hands.

- "And you, Max. So you...Moussa?"

- "Exactly, dude!"

- "Everything right! You chose the smartest one!" joked the redhead.

- "Yeah, he is perfect," blushed Will.

- "Aww, so cute."

- "Don't mock me, you were blushing so hard around Jane before, I'm sure you still do."

- "Oh yeah, she makes me blush. Of anger!"

- "Yeah...sorry..."

- "It's fine, it became a habit."

Will pouted, feeling bad for them. He couldn't imagine how hard it was for them to see the person they loved losing their minds and becoming someone they didn't know.

Jane didn't support the crowd around, so she took something to drink and went outside, in front of the back door, where the dumpsters were. She was firmly holding the barrier of the stairs, clenching her jaw and staring into space. She heard car doors slamming and had a brutal start. She looked around and crouched, like if someone was shooting her.

- "Stop that, Jane!" mumbled the girl between her teeth.

She took a deep breath and straightened. She saw a man approaching her in the dark.

- "Jane?" called the man.

The girl didn't answer, she just frowned. The man approached under the light, revealing who it was.

- "Troy?"

- "Indeed," smiled the boy. "Are you okay?"

- "Yeah, yeah, just...tired," lied the girl.

He knew she was lying. She was all pale and sweating, he saw her scared so many time that he knew it wasn't the tiredness.

- "I heard you're a cop now, it's great."

- "Yeah...I try...What about you?"

- "Well, I'm a pastry chef," smiled Troy.

- "Oh, that's, that's great," said Jane with no enthusiasm.

- "Um...you don't mind if I introduce you to the person who shares my life?"

- "No, no, of course not."

- "Okay, cool, let's go inside."

Troy hesitated, but he offered her his arm. Jane looked at it with a bit fear, but she shyly took it. The two old friends entered in the party, walking through the people. Troy wasn't really happy to see his old Football team, at least Alban wasn't there, but the others, they were looking at him with curiosity. Or maybe they were looking at Jane with curiosity, she was still the dyke. He came back only to see Jane, but the girl didn't seem okay, and it was hurting him. They arrived at the buffet, and Troy gently tapped someone. When this person turned around, Jane dropped her drink on the floor.

- "Juan..." told Jane in a whisper.

- "Um, yeah, you already know each other?" frowned Troy.

- "We...went in the same school," explained his boyfriend with the same surprised expression.

- "Oh, really? What school?"

Juan and Jane shared an uncomfortable look, before both looking away.

- "Is there something wrong?" asked Troy with a concerned tone.

- "No, no, it's fine, it's just...weird," said Jane.

- "Yeah, it's been a long time," added Juan.

- "Okay, maybe I should let you talk alone, I'll come back later."

Troy gave taps on the two persons before walking away. Jane and Juan stayed in that awkward situation, not knowing if they should talk or run away.

- "So...uh...how are you?" asked clumsily Juan.

- "Great, great, well, I try to...feel great...you?"

- "Great too, great too."

Again, an awkward silence.

- "So, um, Troy, he is a nice guy," told Jane with a shaking voice.

- "Yeah, yeah, he is amazing, I'm lucky to have him. And he never ceased to talk about you, I just never knew it was you, THE Jane."

- "Yeah, it would have been less awkward if you knew."

- "Definitely," weakly smiled Juan. "Do...do we have to talk about it?"

- "No! No, I don't think it's a good idea," answered quickly the girl.

- "Yeah, that's what I thought too. Well, you've someone?"

- "Yeah, Max."

- "Tell me it's a girl."
- "Of course it's a girl, you really thought it worked on me!? Never!"
- "I prefer that," smiled Juan. "You're happy with her?"
- "I...I was happy with her, but now...it's complicated..."
- "You don't love her anymore?"
- "I do! It's not that, I just...I don't know, I'm exhausted, and many things happened, but I still love her as the first day...I guess..."

Jane looked down. She never took the time to think of her feelings toward Max, and now, she was just more lost.

While they were talking, Troy was wandering between the others. He saw someone at a table and took the opportunity to talk with this person. He sat with a smile.

- "Oh, Troy! What are you doing here?" frowned Max.
- "You seemed a bit sad, I was wondering how you were," told the boy.
- "I'm fine, I'm tired, that's all."

Max wondered why he was there, they had never been friends in high school, even if he was Jane's. But she noticed him looking down with a sad expression.

- "You're not here to know how I am, right?"
- "No...what happened to her? She was terrified when I saw her outside, and she barely cares about the others...maybe she doesn't like me anymore..."
- "Well, if it can reassure you, she doesn't like anyone anymore," told Max.
- "Yeah...she has PTSD?"
- "Oh, um, yeah, that's what we think. How did you..?"

- "My grand-father had PTSD," explained Troy.
- "He is feeling better?"
- "He is dead."
- "Shit, I'm sorry..."
- "It's fine, it was a long time ago. If it's taken care soon enough, the symptoms can disappear, at least, majority of them."
- "I know, but therapies cost too much, and Jane is too stubborn to admit she has a problem!" said Max.
- "Yeah..."
- "She went in Somalia," began the redhead, "she couldn't find a job, and former veterans were priorities, and as she was a girl, men were priorities too, so, she thought that going in the army would help her when she comes back. So she went in Somalia, Lucas went in Somalia, Bev went in Somalia, and since this, we lost them."
- "Oh...I'm sorry...Beverly went in Somalia?" frowned Troy.
- "Yeah, as a war reporter."

Troy pinched his lips together. He didn't know Jane went to war, he never thought she would. He thought it was brave, but now, she was completely terrified by everything, it wasn't a life!

- "Um, (searches his pockets) there is, a program, it's for one or two weeks, (gives her a prospectus) you can meet professionals, it's not a complete therapy, but it could...help them, to talk about it to someone, to empty their minds, and it could help you to understand them. Maybe, I don't know, maybe they could feel better..."
- "It looks like a place for vacation."
- "Well, when they have private sessions, you can go in a Jacuzzi, and all those kind of stuff."
- "Oh! Sounds good! I don't know if Jane would accept to follow me

in there...but thank you, it could help us," smiled the redhead.

Troy nodded.

- "You know where she is?" asked Max.

- "Um, yeah, she was talking with my boyfriend last time I saw her."

- "Oh, boyfriend? You're full of surprise!"

- "Yeah, many things changed," smiled the boy.

- "It wasn't hard at home when your father and this amazing woman you have as a step-mother learned it?"

- "They kicked me out. So I went back with my mother who didn't hesitate one second to keep me with her."

- "Oh, I would say I'm sorry, but I'm sure it was better like that!"

- "Indeed! And, my boyfriend and Jane already know each other."

- "Yeah? Who is he?" frowned Max.

- "Juan. Did she ever talk to you about him?"

- "I...think, yes. They were in this school with Sister Bernadette. She didn't give me details, but they were in the same room."

- "Oh, shit, I hope I didn't bring back bad memories!"

- "She only has bad memories."

Troy pouted, feeling bad for his friend. She suffered so much in high school that he hoped her life after this nightmare was better. But, apparently, she left a nightmare to enter in another one.

- "You're a cook, right?"

- "Yeah, some days."

- "Some days?" frowned Troy.

- "Don't take it too seriously, it's just, it's not a girl place so the others like to remind me this. It makes things harder, but it's better than home. I guess. What about you? You're not a famous Football player, right? I would certainly hear about you."

- "No," lightly chuckled the man. "I've a bakery."

- "Really!? That's awesome! Where!? I wanna taste your works!"

- "Well, you already did! It's in New-York."

- "Wh- Uh...Jefferson's bakery!? It's you!? (he nods) No way! I always go to this bakery!" told Max with excitement.

- "I know, I saw you sometimes."

- "Really? Why didn't you show up?"

- "I don't know, I thought that maybe you didn't want to see me so, I preferred letting you alone."

- "Don't hesitate to see me if you want, we're good now. And if you're in New-York, you can come to see Jane if you want, and, if she wants, of course."

- "I would love to."

Troy and Max exchanged their contact details. They kept talking about their works a moment, even thinking of their futures, and, why not, working together. They were joined by all the others: Will and his boyfriend, Mike with his girlfriend, Moussa, Dustin, Gabrielle, and Juan. Troy and Will talked a lot, realizing they had more common points than they thought. Will even thought that if Troy wasn't a bully in high school, he would have a crush on him. But now he had James, and he was very happy with him. And Juan was very nice, they seemed really in love of each other.

- "Where did you abandon your boyfriend?" asked Max.

- "Near the entrance, he didn't want to go farther, and he didn't want to see me, so, I'll take him back when I leave," explained Gabrielle. "Jane?"

- "I don't know, she was with Juan, but now, she is certainly hiding."

The two girls felt a pinch in their hearts. They were feeling guilty for abandoning them like that, both of them were certainly terrified by all this people around them, having panic attacks, or flashbacks, while the two girls were having fun. Max looked at her watch and realized it wasn't even 11.

- "We should find them," told the black-haired girl.

- "Yeah..."

Max and Gabrielle grabbed Moussa, and the three walked through the crowd to find their lovers. Beverly was sitting in the benches, looking down and covering her ears. Gabrielle found her boyfriend where she let him. Max needed more time to find Jane, but the girl was outside, talking with Clara and her girlfriend. She could see that Jane wasn't feeling okay, she was giving quick looks around her, her body was shaking a lot, and she was sweating more than usual.

- "Hey Max," smiled the brunette.

- "Hey Clara, how are you?" asked Max.

- "I'm fine, I found Jane alone, she seemed lost."

- "Yeah, it's a constant mood lately," sighed the redhead.

- "Is everything okay?"

- "It's...complicated, we think she has PTSD."

- "Oh no..."

Clara felt so sorry that she opened her arms to hug her, but Max blocked her with her arm.

- "Don't touch her!" intervened quickly Max. "I don't say that because I'm being jealous, or something like that, but she doesn't want to be touched, by anyone, she doesn't support that."

- "Oh, okay, sorry..."

- "It's fine, you didn't know."

Clara weakly nodded, with sad eyes. She didn't want to bother them more so she said goodbye to the two girls, before walking inside with her girlfriend.

- "Jane? You're here?"

- "Yeah, yeah."

- "We're leaving, okay?"

- "Okay."

Max put a gentle hand on her girlfriend's shoulder, but the girl freed herself before walking away. The redhead still had hope that, one day, Jane would accept a physical contact. When they arrived near the car, Moussa and Beverly were already there waiting. As soon as Jane noticed them, especially Bev, she stopped.

- "What the fuck is that!?" got angry Jane.

- "Their car broke down, I told them we would bring them back to their hotel," explained Max.

- "This is a joke!?"

- "No, it's not! Stop acting like a child and make an effort! It's not gonna be long!"

- "It's already too long!"

- "We can take the bus if it's a problem," told Moussa.

- "NO! Bev can't take the bus twice in the same day, she is my friend, and I want her to feel okay while she goes back to her hotel!" affirmed Max. "It's not a long ride, they can do it! So, now, you go in the car before I force you!"

Jane clenched her jaw and crossed her arms like a child sulking, so Max decided to treat her like a child. She quickly walked to her, grabbed her jacket, and threw her in the passenger seat.

- "Let's go now!" told the redhead to Bev and Moussa.

Beverly sat behind Max, while Moussa sat behind Jane. The first half of the ride was quiet, but, at a moment, Beverly began to stress and covered her ears while moving back and forth, murmuring things. Jane put her legs against her torso and wrapped her arms around her knees, hiding her face in them.

- "Moussa—"

- "It's the last time," cut the man, already knowing what she was going to say.

- "Yeah..."

She kept driving, not daring to say something else. But the two girls really seemed bad, uncomfortable. Bev began to move back and forth faster, closing her eyes firmly, breathing heavily, and crushing her ears.

- "STOP SCREAMING!" yelled the redhead.

She brutally hit the car door with her body, trying to open it.

- "Stop the car!" ordered Moussa with a worried tone.

Max didn't think more and stopped on the side of the road, under the moon lightly lighting them. Beverly managed to open the door and jumped from the car, falling on her knees, crying. Moussa joined her and tried to calm her. Max stayed in the car with Jane, not knowing what to do.

- "Who was screaming?" frowned Max.

She wasn't expecting an answer from Jane, but she wasn't expecting a movement either. Jane slowly turned her head to her, giving her the darkest and scariest look she ever did. Max gulped with difficulties, wondering if she was going to kill her right now or not. She preferred not figuring it out and left the car. But Jane did the same, with an angry walk.

- "It's you who begged me to do something! I DID!" told Jane,

pointing at Bev.

- "I never wanted this, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry..." cried Bev on her knees in the cold mud.

- "THIS IS YOUR FAULT!"

- "I know...I know...I'm sorry...I never wanted to hurt you..."

- "I wish it was you."

Max grabbed Jane by her arm to take her aside, worried that she could become violent and punched Bev without stopping.

- "We will walk," told Moussa. "Thanks for the ride."

- "Okay, good luck," answered Max.

She watched Moussa and Beverly walking away, while she was blocking Jane against the car with her hand. She turned her head and saw Jane breathing heavily with her mouth, looking away with her wet eyes.

- "What the fuck was that!?" asked Max.

- "She begged me! And now she blames me!? What the fuck is wrong with her!?" replied Jane.

- "I...I don't know, I don't understand what you're talking about..."

Jane clenched more her jaw and closed her eyes, letting run some tears. Max slowly relaxed her hand from Jane's torso, even if she was quite enjoying it. They stayed a moment on the side on the road, not talking, with only Jane silently sobbing. The redhead slowly raised her hands to Jane's face to wipe her cheeks, but she stopped.

- "Don't touch me..." said Jane in a whisper.

- "I know, I'm not touching you, it's fine," reassured Max.

She didn't know what to do with her hands, so she put them on the car, on each side of Jane, like an air hug. When Jane calmed down,

the two girls went back in the car, in direction of their hotel, where they would finish the night in silence.

9. Coffee

The alarm clock woke Max up. Jane didn't scream this night, meaning she didn't sleep at all. She straightened in the bed and looked on the floor where Jane had spent the night.

- "How are you?" yawned the redhead.

- "I don't know..." answered Jane looking at the ceiling.

- "You didn't sleep?"

- "No."

- "If you're too tired, I can tell Joyce you're not feeling okay, she will understand."

- "I'm fine."

- "Okay, good. You wanna eat?"

- "I'm not hungry."

- "Well, I'm starving, I'm gonna ask for a breakfast in the room."

- "Okay."

Max grabbed the phone and asked for two breakfasts. She wanted Jane to eat a bit, she didn't remember seeing her eat something the day before.

- "You don't wanna come up there?" proposed Max.

- "I'm good here," mumbled Jane.

- "It's comfy you know, and there is enough space for you, far from me."

Jane clenched her jaw and closed her fists. She knew Max by heart, and she knew she wouldn't stop until she came up. So she did, making smile Max, and annoying more Jane.

- "I can see in your expression how happy you are to be in bed with me," told ironically the redhead.

Jane shrugged of annoyance.

- "Well, at least I spend some time with you, even if you're upset, it's still that for me, and it means a lot."

- "Yeah, yeah, whatever!"

- "I love you."

- "I know."

Someone knocked at the door, and Max got up to open it. She thanked the man and gave him a bill, before taking the tray with the two breakfasts on it and laying again next to Jane.

- "Here, this is for you," smiled Max, moving the second breakfast in her girlfriend's direction.

- "I told you I wasn't hungry!" got irritated Jane.

- "I know, but you didn't eat yesterday, and I'll insist anyway so, let's win some time, and bite this toast."

- "No."

- "You're such a child!"

- "I'm not hungry!"

- "Just fucking eat! I'm not asking you to fly! Just to eat a bit! Is it hard!?" got angry Max.

The two girls stared angrily at each other, waiting for the other to give up. It was Jane who broke the look, which surprised Max. The brunette took the piece of toast with cherry jam and ate it a bit.

- "More," ordered the redhead.

- "You're kidding!?"

- "Do I look like I'm kidding!?"

Jane sighed with her nose and ate the entire piece of toast.

- "Thank you. I don't do this to bother you, you know, I just want you to stay alive, but sometime, I wonder if you want it too. We'll go to this weeks in paradise to clear your fucking mind!"

- "What!?" frowned Jane. "What is it again!?"

- "Troy talked to me about a place with professionals who take care of PTSD, thing that you have, even if you deny it! We'll go! Because there are people worrying and caring about you!"

- "No! Fuck no! I'm fine! I just need time, but I can handle it by my own!"

- "I give you one month, if you're not better, you shut the fuck up, and you come with me at this place."

Jane didn't answer, she just grumbled some inaudible things. Max held her out a glass of orange juice, which she drank, giving some energy in her body. She stopped fighting for now, relaxing a bit the redhead.

- "Where is the coffee!?" asked sharply Jane.

- "There is none."

- "Why!?"

- "Because you drink enough coffee, if not too much! Today, it's orange juice, and hot chocolate if you want, but no coffee. It's like that, you can complain as much as you want, I don't care, you drink what I give you, or you go downstairs and prepared your cup of coffee yourself, okay!?" replied Max.

Jane stayed dazed. She didn't even react. She took the cup of hot chocolate and drank it without complaining. Max kept eating, preparing toast for Jane who ate them.

- "I'm proud of you," smiled Max.

- "I ate toast, whouhou, what an exploit!" said ironically Jane with an annoyed tone.

- "It's a lot, and more than yesterday, at least you've some energy for the day."

- "Yeah..."

Max pouted, feeling sad for Jane. The other girl was unable to see how much she was capable of. The redhead finished her breakfast before getting ready. Joyce was waiting them for lunch, which meant they had time to "visit" Hawkins a little bit. In fact, she was curious to see if her mother was still there.

Once ready, the two girls went in the car. Max rode in the streets of Hawkins, noticing things didn't change a lot. There was still a division between the poor side and the rich side. She drove in front of her friends' houses without stopping, feeling a bit nostalgic, in front of the skate park, the shop where Jane had worked with Joyce, and all those places full of memories, where everything was barely fine. She finally arrived in front of her mother's house and parked in the street. She didn't move, not really knowing if she wanted to see her again or not. And she would have preferred to have a happy Jane with her, to show her that she made the right choice by choosing her.

- "Why are we here!?" asked Jane.

- "I...I'm not sure...I thought I could see my mom..."

- "Then, just go!"

- "Thanks for the support!" told Max with an irritated tone.

- "What do you want me to do!?"

- "Nothing, as usual."

Max didn't wait for Jane to answer and left the car. She took a deep breath and slowly approached her house with her shaking legs. She didn't know why she was stressing, certainly because last time she saw her they argued, or because she was sure she would reject her again, like 6 years ago. Once in front of the door, she froze. She

thought it was a bad idea, things certainly never changed, Neil was still there, being an asshole, punching little lesbians at their work and traumatizing people who had the bad chance to meet him.

She was going to step back when a hand knocked at the door. She turned her head and saw Jane standing next to her. Max thanked her with her eyes and a weak smile. Even if Jane didn't seem happy to be here, she still made the effort to go out of the car to support her, and it meant a lot for her, it had been a while that Jane didn't show any form of tenderness.

The door opened, and her mother appeared. The woman was skinnier since the last time, but she had more colors on her skin. The mother had a surprised expression, while Max opened her mouth to talk, but no words came out. Susan opened her arms and took her daughter in her arms, not believing it. Max, surprised, frowned at Jane to see if she was understanding more her reaction, before shyly wrapping her arms around her.

- "I thought I would never see you again," said the mother with tears in her eyes.

- "Um...yeah....me too," answered clumsily Max.

The mother broke the hug and took a moment to admire her daughter.

- "You're beautiful," smiled Susan. "Come in!"

The mother moved aside to let her daughter enter. Max gave a quick look at Jane before going inside. Susan stayed at the door, looking at Jane who didn't move.

- "You too," told softly the mother.

Jane looked behind to see if there was someone, but she was talking to her. She shyly entered, hoping that Neil was somewhere else. Susan invited the two girls to sit in the couch.

- "Are you hungry? Do you want to drink something?" asked the mother.

- "Do you have coffee?" answered Jane.

- "Yes! I have coffee, and you Max?"

- "Nothing, I'm good, thanks."

Susan smiled to them before going to the kitchen. Max looked at Jane with folded eyes and shook her head to show her disapproval.

- "She asked."

- "Yeah, and you jumped on the opportunity!"

- "Yes, and I'm not ashamed of it."

- "I see!"

The mother came back with a cup of coffee that she gave to Jane.

- "So, tell me everything!"

- "Well..."

Max began her long account of those last years, making her mother's eyes sparkling of joy and pride.

- "And what about you?" asked Max.

- "Oh, nothing important," answered Susan.

- "You're still with..?"

- "Neil? No, I kicked him out like...5 years ago?"

- "Really!? That's awesome!"

- "Yeah, well, the fact that everyone was running away from us helped me to realize he was the problem, and you leaving me broke me, so, I stayed with him because I thought I just had him, but he was the reason of why I just had him, so, he had to leave."

- "Why didn't you come to me after?" frowned Max.

- "I...I thought you were hating me...and I couldn't blame you for this..."

- "Oh...I'm sorry..."

- "Don't be, it was all my fault, and your love for Jane was real, I'm glad you're still together, even after all those shits that happened to you," told Susan.

- "Yeah..."

- "What's wrong?"

- "Nothing," answered too quickly the redhead.

Susan didn't insist, but she could tell that something was wrong. They kept talking about their lives and how happy they were to see each other again, they lost enough time. After two hours, Jane and Max had to leave. It was when they were at the door that Jane decided to evacuate all the coffee she drank, enabling the mother to ask some questions about her.

- "Is she okay?" asked Susan.

- "Not really," sighed Max. "She has PTSD, well, that's what we think. She went in Somalia as a soldier and now...she is all broken..."

- "Oh...poor girl..."

- "Yeah, but Troy talked to me about a place which could help her, I'll bring her there if it gets worse."

- "I hope she will be fine. And, if you need anything, you know you can call me, right?"

- "Yeah, I know," smiled the redhead.

Jane reappeared. The two girls said goodbye to the mother, before going to their car, in direction of their next destination.

10. Lunch

When they arrived, everybody's cars were already here. They were, apparently, the last ones. Max parked her car and waited a moment.

- "You're ready?" asked the redhead.

- "I guess..."

- "If you prefer coming back to the hotel and waiting for me, it's fine."

- "No, I can do it," sighed Jane, a bit stressed.

- "It's just friends inside, okay? They are here because they like you, they won't hurt you. And, if you wanna leave, you tell me, and we go back to the hotel, okay?"

Jane nodded. She was exhausted by all of this, but she convinced herself to do it, to not fall in depression, she thought she could do it by trying to live, but it wasn't working very well, she was still feeling dead inside.

The two girls got out of the car and approached the door. Max gave a quick look to Jane, to check how she was, and knocked. Joyce immediately opened the door and took Max in her arms. Two hugs in a day, it was more than usual since Jane came back! The mother broke the hug and took Jane in her arms, not knowing the struggle she had with it. The girl's body tensed, but she didn't reject her. Joyce finally broke the hug, freeing the girl, and invited the two girls to enter. Everyone was there: Mike and his girlfriend, Will and James, Dustin and Suzy, Gabrielle and Lucas, and Moussa and Beverly.

- "I'm so happy to see all of you!" told happily Joyce.

- "Yeah, we're happy to be here too," said Mike. "Thanks for welcoming us!"

- "It's nothing, you're all family for me."

The teens were activated and began to help Joyce with the lunch. Gabrielle moved Lucas to the table, while Dustin, James, Will, Mike,

and Julia –Mike's girlfriend- went to the kitchen with the mother. Moussa stayed with Beverly, near the couch, and Max managed to convince Jane to come with them. The two girls arrived at the kitchen, Max let Jane at the table and joined her friends. She didn't think letting Jane with Lucas was a good idea, with Bev it was worse than she thought, but she hoped it would be fine.

Jane stayed in front of the table without moving, avoiding eyes contact with Lucas. The boy was closing his fists, feeling his nails sinking in his palms.

- "Why you're so happy!?" grumbled Lucas between his teeth.

- "I'm not," answered Jane, sharpening the kitchen knife.

- "Why you came then!?"

- "Could ask you the same!"

- "You really think I can do everything I want with just one fucking leg!?"

- "Many people have one leg, and they are capable of living!"

- "Said the girl who has two legs!"

- "(leans to him with the knife next to his face) you want me to take off the other one!? Like that you'll have a good reason to cry like a baby!"

The others around felt the tension between them and stopped doing what they were doing, watching them. Max and Gabrielle approached their lovers, Max grabbing the knife, and Gabrielle the wheelchair.

- "You don't wanna take some air?" said softly the redhead.

Jane clenched her jaw. She wanted to say something mean to Lucas, but she preferred keeping it for herself. She nodded and went outside, while Gabrielle rolled Lucas to Will's room.

- "It's always like that?" asked Joyce.

- "Majority of the time, yes, but we try to keep them far from each other," sighed Max.

- "I'm sorry..."

- "It's not your fault...I should check how she is."

The redhead left them to go outside. Jane was pacing near the car, looking down.

- "You're okay?" asked Max.

- "Yes! I'm fine! Stop asking me that!" told angrily Jane.

- "I'm just worried! I thought you were gon—"

- "Gonna what!? Cut his leg!? Who do you think I am!? I'VE NOTHING TO DO WITH HIS LEG!"

- "No, of course not!" answered quickly the redhead. "It's just, you seemed angry, I didn't want you to hurt yourself! Please calm down..."

- "I'M FUCKING CALM!"

Jane kept pacing, her breath heavy, her fists closed, and her face red. Max stayed next to her with her arms crossed. She wanted to keep an eye on her, she didn't know what she was capable of when she was angry.

- "I've never seen her this angry," stated Mike, looking at the window with the others.

- "Jane had always been angry, even before," frowned Joyce. "She was victim of discrimination, rejection, injustice, she lost her first girlfriend in a tragic way, she lost her sister brutally in a tragic accident, Max's step-father assaulted her in the shop—"

- "And the locker-room," added Dustin. "She was so scared to just walk in front of it when she came back."

- "See, I always saw her angry after everything and everyone, and

with her PTSD, she just loses control easier."

- "They changed..." sighed Will.

- "Dude! They went in Somalia! What they saw there is certainly worse than what we can imagine!" said Dustin.

- "I know, I'm just sad for them...they don't feel okay..."

- "Clearly not."

- "And we can't do anything, it's frustrating!"

- "Supporting them is more than you think, it's already a lot," told Joyce. "Max, Moussa, and Gabrielle are the best support they could dream of, they are strong, ready to do anything for them, it's important for their mental health."

- "Yeah..."

They sighed with their mouths, still watching Max talking to Jane to calm her. At the same moment, Gabrielle and Moussa reappeared behind them.

- "How are they?" asked Joyce.

- "Bev calmed down, it was a small panic attack," explained Moussa.

- "Okay, cool. What about Lucas?"

- "Awful, as usual. I'm really sorry about this, he always provokes Jane, I don't know why, I'm sorry, really..."

- "Don't be, sweetie, it's not your fault, it's fine, we understand."

- "Yeah, no problem, we knew there could be some tensions with them," told Mike.

- "They are heroes for me," said James. "Risking their lives to save others' lives, I'm honored to just be in the same room as them."

Will was touched by his words. He knew it wasn't a good idea for him to tell that to them, but he would have loved to, to let them know

how important they were for someone. When Max walked back in the house, the group was still at the window, but this time, they were watching the door, waiting for her.

- "How is she?" asked Mike.

- "She is fine, don't worry, she will calm down," answered Max like if it was nothing. "I'm sorry for this, she is a bit...hotheaded, lately."

- "Don't worry, it's fine," reassured Joyce.

- "Yeah...(turns to Gabrielle and Moussa) Did they say something?"

- "Bev feels guilty, she says it's her fault, but nothing more."

- "Yeah, like yesterday."

- "Sinclair blames Jane for his leg, apparently, but I don't know why," pouted the black-haired girl.

- "Well, Jane claimed she has nothing to do with his leg," said Max.

- "Yeah, we don't know more!" stated Moussa.

- "She stays outside?" frowned Dustin.

- "I told her I would call her for lunch," said Max.

Dustin pinched his lips together and nodded.

- "You should take some rest, you all seem exhausted, just sit on the couch and relax," told Joyce.

- "I'll help you," said Will.

- "Thank you, but you don't have to."

- "I know."

The mother smiled to him to thank him, before going to the kitchen, followed by Will and James. Max, Moussa, and Gabrielle enjoyed this moment of peace with their friends, talking about something else than their lovers' problems. Dustin explained them how cool his work

was but couldn't tell what the game he was working on was, Suzy told them how awful it was to be pregnant, Mike talked about his flowers shop and how he met his girlfriend, and Will recounted his first date with James, and how stressed he was. Max, Moussa, and Gabrielle laughed like they never laughed before. They didn't remember when the last time they laughed was! It was so pleasant and relaxing, they were glad to be here.

Now it was lunchtime. Max went outside to tell Jane, who came instantly, Gabrielle took Lucas to the table, and Moussa went to Beverly and waited for her to be ready. They sat them as far as possible from each other, not wanting another fight. They remained quiet the entire meal. Bev seemed absent, Jane focused on everything around, and Lucas angry at his plate. They didn't eat much, but, at least, they didn't fight. Once the meal over, they cleared the table, letting the three alone.

- "It was your idea," mumbled Lucas.

Jane didn't answer, but her body began to shake. She tried to ignore him, but her brain kept bringing flashbacks in her eyes.

- "You asked for it," continued Lucas. "You asked for it, and you got what you wanted, you can't blame anyone for it, especially because you enjoyed it!"

Jane jumped on him, raised him, before flattening him on the floor. She put her knees on each side of the boy, before beginning to punch him, again and again. She was feeling an anger so strong that she didn't feel her hands bleeding. Her heart was racing, her face was red, her veins were ready to explode, and her eyes were bulging. She needed to evacuate the tension in her muscles, it was all she wanted. Not caring of the consequences. She didn't want to hear him, he was so stupid and mean! She just wanted him to shut up for once! Someone tried to stop her, but she pushed this person, wanting to continue. She kept punching him, but a strong arm blocked hers, slid behind her neck, and went under the other arm, not allowing her to move. This person forced her to stand and to go outside.

- "Sinclair! (kneels next to him) Sinclair! Do you hear me!?"

Joyce ran to the phone and called an ambulance. Everyone around stayed dazed, while Gabrielle was shaking her boyfriend who was unconscious on the floor, and James, who was a nurse, was kneeling next to him to check his wounds.

- "She almost killed him! You're supposed to control her! What the fuck is wrong with you!?"

- "What!? Me!? I can't be always on her back!" replied Max.

- "You should!"

- "I'm not gonna put a leash and tied her at a tree! She is not a fucking dog!"

- "Oh yeah! You prefer letting her killing everyone!?" stated Gabrielle with tears in her eyes.

- "I'm sorry to tell you this, but that's what he wanted! He provoked her on purpose! Maybe Jane needs a leash, but Lucas clearly needs a muzzle!"

While the two girls were fighting inside, Moussa was holding Jane and bringing her a bit far. He threw her on the dirt and crushed her body with his, holding her hands on her back.

- "GET OFF ME!" yelled the girl, struggling.

- "Not before you calm down!" replied the man.

- "I'M FUCKING CALM! GET OFF ME! GET OFF ME!"

Jane tried to struggle but Moussa closed more his hand around her wrists and put his other one on her head, blocking it on the dirt.

- "Do have I to remind you that I'm heavier than you!? I'm the cheeseburger and you're the French fry! But it's fine, keep struggling, you'll calm down faster."

- "FUCK YOU! FUCK YOU!"

- "I don't like doing this, Jane! Especially to you!"

- "THEN GET OFF ME!"

- "I will!"

- "NOW!"

Jane struggled again and again, until her body began to be weaker and weaker. She felt all her anger disappearing, giving place to sadness now. She focused on her breathing to hold her tears, but some fell on her cheeks. Moussa decided it was the right moment to relax the pressure on her body. He took support on his hand and stood, while Jane stayed on the floor. The pressure disappearing made her cry. Moussa stayed a moment next to her, trying to stay strong, but seeing her like that was breaking his heart. After several minutes Jane quickly stood and began to walk away.

- "Where are you going!?" asked Moussa.

- "Somewhere else!"

- "You don't want a ride?"

- "I can walk! Leave me alone!"

- "You shouldn—"

- "SHUT UP!"

Jane kept walking away. Moussa didn't follow her, preferring going back inside to see how the others were. When he entered, everyone was strangely calm. Gabrielle and James were still next to Lucas, who opened his eyes, Joyce, Will, and Julia next to them, while Max was in the living-room, pacing, with Suzy, and Mike with her. Moussa went directly to the redhead.

- "How is she!?" asked quickly Max, keeping her voice down.

- "I think I calmed her, but she left."

- "What!? Alone!?"

- "I know, I shouldn't, but I didn't want to let Bev alone!"

- "Bev is not alone! She is with Dustin in Joyce's room, but Jane IS alone, right now! If she gets lost it'll be your fault!"

- "She was sane! She will be fine!"

- "You have to be right!"

Max took her stuff and Jane's stuff before leaving the house. She wanted to take her car to follow Jane, but the ambulance arrived with the Chief's car who stopped her to ask her some questions. She hadn't seen Hopper for years now! He seemed so old! She tried to explain him that she didn't have the time, but he didn't let her go before he finished his questions. She answered as fast as she could, but it lasted half an hour and she wasn't allowed to leave before he allowed them. Lucas had a broken jaw and a risk of concussion. The Chief wanted to ask Jane some questions, so Max told them she would bring her to the police station the next day. Hopper didn't fight more and agreed. The redhead was finally allowed to leave and went directly to the hotel. She jumped from her car and entered the building.

- "Be here, be here, be here, (enters the elevator) be here, be here, be here, be here, be here, (leaves the elevator and arrives in front of her door, where she searches for her keys) be here, be here, be here, (opens the door and enters)."

Jane was laying down in the bed, her eyes closed.

- "(turns to close the door) Be alive, be alive, be alive, be alive," mumbled the redhead to herself.

She slowly walked to her girlfriend and bent over her to check her breathing. She was alive, which revealed the redhead, but Jane's hands were still bleeding and they were mixed between red and purple.

- "You're awake?"

Jane started and frowned when she saw Max.

- "You're awake. You remember what happened, right?"

- "I'm not crazy!" got irritated Jane, straightening.

- "I know, I know! He provoked you, but I don't think punching him to blood was a good idea! Now the Chief wants to talk to you and I'm not sure it's to know how you are!" stated angrily Max.

- "I fuck the Chief!"

- "No, Jane! You don't fuck anybody! Tomorrow, I bring you to the police station, and you'll answer to their questions and assume the consequences! But now, I'm gonna take care of your hands, whether you like it or not!"

Jane clenched her jaw but didn't complain. Max took her first aid kit before sitting next to Jane. Her hands were swollen and shaking. She did the best she could, but Jane seemed very uncomfortable, so Max tried to do it as fast as possible. When her hands were bandaged, Jane lied down where she slept the night before and didn't move from here. Max didn't try to begin a conversation, too tired, and went in her bed, waiting for the time to let her fall asleep.

11. Long night

The next day, Max brought Jane to the police station. The Chief kept her for the day to interrogate her and to make her do a psychological test. Gabrielle was there too, to know if she was going to make a complaint against Jane or not. Max hoped she wouldn't, but she could understand why she would do it, it was an assault. The black-haired girl approached Max with a tired face.

- "How is Lucas?" asked shyly Max.
- "He can't talk, which is not totally bad news. He needs multiple operations for his jaw, but he doesn't have a concussion. The insurance can cover majority of the hospitalization and operations."
- "Oh, that's great, I'm happy for you."
- "Look, I don't want to make a complaint against Jane, she is sick, she needs help, and you did so much for me. I know you can't stay on her back every second of your life, I'm sorry for what I said yesterday..."
- "It's fine, I understand, you were scared, Jane was crazy, but if you think you should make a complaint and ask for justice, I understand."

Gabrielle nodded. The second after, the Chief reappeared, freeing Jane.

- "I already said I didn't want to make a complaint," told Gabrielle. "It won't help her."
- "I, I don't know how to thank you!"
- "Well...I, I was thinking, maybe, you could help me with...financial budget, for Sinclair..."
- "Of course, no problem, we've two salaries, we can help you."
- "Thank you."

Max put a friendly hand on Gabrielle's shoulder before leaving the

police station with her girlfriend. She was glad Gabrielle didn't make a complaint, it would have complicated everything. But she wasn't sure Jane understood how wrong it was to punch him. At least, someone changed her bandages, it looked better.

They stayed the night at the hotel before going back to New-York. Jane's boss heard about this quarrel and decided to suspend her for two weeks, upsetting a lot the girl. Now, Jane had to stay at the apartment all day long, getting bored and finding every reason to be angry! So, Max decided to work more, first to help Gabrielle with Lucas, and second to avoid Jane as much as possible. She preferred hearing her co-workers mock her gender, her sexuality, or even her hair, than hearing Jane yell at her for nothing, with the risk to get punched or worse. It wasn't the right thing to do, but, for now, it was her only solution.

She had been in the kitchen for four hours, so she decided to take her break right after the rush hour. She went outside, a bit aside of the waitresses, lighted a cigarette, and called Gabrielle with her mobile phone.

- "Hello?" answered the black-haired girl.

- "Hey, how are you?" asked Max with her cigarette between her lips.

- "Tired, Sinclair was operated yesterday, he still can't talk, and he is hurt as fuck, it's horrible to see...and you?"

- "Tired too, Jane has been suspended for only five days, I already can't stand her!"

- "Damn...bad period!"

- "Yeah...I'm sorry for what Jane did, I should have stopped her..."

- "You tried, she was so much lost in her anger that she didn't even notice it was you! Don't worry, it will be better. I'm not mad at you, and not at her either."

- "Well, I'm mad at her! If she wasn't so stubborn, she would see a psychologist, and talk, and empty her mind, and clear her head! But nooo! She preferred staying stuck in her pain! What a dumbass!"

- "Max, she is sick, same for Sinclair, and same for Bev. We can't control them and force them to be rational!" stated Gabrielle.

- "I know! I know, it's just...I miss her, I miss her so much, and she feels so bad, I can't do anything for this! She just feels bad, and she loses her mind, and she acts differently than before, sometimes it's like I'm living with a stranger! It's not her, it's her body, but she is not inside, my Jane doesn't yell for a piece of bread, or hide when she heard a door slamming, my Jane smiled, laughed, joked, had fun, loved me...sometimes I'm invisible...I don't remember when the last time she looked at me, said something nice to me, just showed a tiny form of love were..." confessed Max with tears in her eyes.

- "I know...I know what you live...You work a lot today?"

- "Oh, uh, yeah, I finish like, at around midnight, something like that. We've important people tonight, which means lots of covers, lots of sweats, and lots of pressure! I'm gonna die."

- "Don't! Moussa and I need you!" lightly joked the black-haired girl.

- "I know, you're lost without me," weakly smiled the redhead. "I've to go, good luck in there!"

- "You too, bye."

Max hung up her phone but didn't go back inside immediately. She finished her cigarette and wiped her eyes, not wanting her co-workers to mock her for crying. She didn't want them to mock her for this, because her tears were involving Jane, and she didn't want them to mock Jane, she didn't need that. She crushed her cigarette and threw the butt in the bin next to her. She took a deep breath to calm herself and was about to go back inside, when a shape appeared in front of her, making her start.

- "Shit, Lisa! You scared the shit out of me!" told Max.

- "Are you okay?" asked the brunette.

- "Yeah, yeah...just, personal problems."

- "I'm not gonna lie, I listened to you, but before you get mad, it's

only because I'm worried for you, I see that you're not okay...it's hell at home?"

- "Um...yeah...kinda..."

Lisa didn't say more. Instead, she opened her arms and wrapped them around the redhead. Max got surprised, but she didn't have a physical contact since so much time that she wrapped her arms around her too, tightening the hug. It was so pleasant and warm, she needed that. She felt good inside. Someone cared of how she was, gave her some comfort and support. She wanted it to last forever. But Lisa broke the hug, placed a kiss on the redhead's cheek, and smiled warmly to her. Max was a bit dazed and felt her cheeks burning.

The two girls went back inside like if nothing happened. Well, nothing happened, but Max was troubled by Lisa, she was confused by what she felt inside, it wasn't right, but it was so pleasant. She kept thinking of that while she was cooking, but, rapidly, the work brought her back down to earth. It was 8pm, and the important people arrived. They were thirty, plus the other covers, it was a race. Everyone decided to eat at the restaurant the same night apparently! She didn't have time to finish her plate that she had to prepare three others! It was exhausting, she didn't know where she found all this energy to last the entire night!

It was 1am, and the restaurant finally closed. All the cooks were tired, physically exhausted, but someone had to stay to clean the kitchen. The chef obviously asked Max to do it! The redhead couldn't believe it, she was the only one who was there since the restaurant opened this morning, and she was the one who had to close it! She was sadly used to it. She began to clean when she heard rumbling outside. It wasn't a good thing, so she tried to go faster, but there was so much to do. She was cleaning her stuff when she heard footsteps behind her.

- "Lisa!? You're still there!?" frowned the redhead.

- "Um, yeah, I was smoking and I heard noises inside, I was sure they would ask you to clean everything."

- "Yeah, like every time!"

- "You need a hand?"

- "I'm not against some help!"

Lisa had an amused smile and began to help. The two girls spent almost two hours in this kitchen, actually having fun together, sharing many passions like skateboard, sci-fi movies, video games, and all those kind of things. Max strangely spent a good time by cleaning this kitchen, talking about something else than couple's problems. She even laughed! It was a really good moment.

- "Well, thank you for your help, I wouldn't be able to go home if I was alone!" smiled Max.

- "No problem, if you need anything, you know I'm here."

- "Yeah, sure. I spent a really good time by the way."

- "Me too."

Max was going to leave, but she got mesmerized by the brunette approaching her. Lisa put a gently hand on her cheek, lightly caressing it, before placing her lips on the redhead's. Max felt bad, not because she let Lisa kissing her, but because she was kissing back and enjoying it. She didn't remember when the last time someone kissed her the way she did was. It was passionate and tender at the same time. She heard a stronger rumble and broke the kiss.

- "Uh...I'm sorry, I already have someone," said shyly Max with red cheeks.

- "I know. Someone who doesn't really give you what you need, not like me," stated Lisa, biting her bottom lip.

- "Um, I, I, I've to go, I'm sorry..."

Max took her stuff and left the kitchen as fast as possible. It was rambling more and more and she had to be home very quickly. She couldn't stop thinking of what just happened. How could she do this to Janel? It wasn't her fault if she had PTSD! She never thought she could do that to her, after everything that happened between them, just letting a random girl kissing her was pathetic and weak. She

hated herself so much for this, but she loved it so much too. Her lips were so soft and her caresses so pleasant. No, she couldn't do that to Jane, she needed to stay focus. She arrived inside her apartment. It was empty and the thunder was rumbling hard outside.

- "Jane!? Jane, are you here!?" asked Max with a worried tone.

She closed her door and began to search her. She wasn't in the living-room, not in the kitchen, not in the bathrooms, she could only be in her own bedroom. She lightly knocked but heard no answer, so she slowly opened the door. A big mass was in her bed, under a blanket.

- "Oh, Jane..." sighed Max.

The redhead sat on the bed and placed a hand on her girlfriend who started.

- "It's just me, it's just me!" told quickly Max.

Jane took off the blanket, revealing her cat in her arms, and, most importantly, her red puffy eyes.

- "It's just the thunder, Jane. You're inside, it won't hurt you."

- "YOU DON'T THINK I ALREADY KNOW!? IT KEEPS GOING IN MY MIND! I CAN'T CONTROL IT!"

- "I'm, I'm sorry...I'm so sorry..." apologized Max with tears in her eyes.

- "I DON'T GIVE A FUCK! GET OUT OF HERE! I DON'T WANNA SEE YOU!" yelled Jane with tears in her eyes too.

Max didn't insist. She was so tired that she couldn't control her emotions right now, and crying in front of Jane, after what she did, wasn't fair. She left the room and went directly in hers, changing her clothes and laying down in her bed. She spent majority of the night crying of guilt and pain. Every time a thunder was hitting the ground, she could see Jane having the biggest fear of her life, while her she was having fun with another girl. She was disgusted and disgusting.

12. Good old days

The next day, Max wasn't working until night, enabling the girl to sleep. When she woke up, she realized she didn't hear Jane yell and didn't know if it was because Jane didn't sleep, or if she was so tired that she was close to a coma. It was the beginning of the afternoon, so she got out of her bed. It wasn't rumbling anymore outside, maybe Jane had some sleep. Well, she hoped! She went in her corridor and noticed that Jane wasn't in her room. She continued to the living-room, and saw her in the couch, looking at the ceiling like a cadaver in their coffin.

- "Hello Jane," said Max.

Jane didn't answer, like usual. Max didn't really wait for an answer, she directly went in the kitchen to prepare something to eat. She was tired so she just prepared pasta with cream and mushrooms, her favorite meal. Once ready, she decided to eat in the living-room, on the coffee table. She put the tray on it and sat next to Jane. The brunette had a frown and straightened.

- "Here, it's your plate," told the redhead.

- "I'm not hungry."

- "I know, and I don't care."

Jane let Max put the plate on her lap. Max lighted on the TV, her plate on her lap, and leaned against the couch.

- "You wanna watch something?" asked Max.

- "Why?" frowned Jane.

- "I don't know, to have something to watch!"

- "No, why are we eating here!? Like that!? What did I do!?"

- "What? Nothing! I just wanna spend some time with you, that's all!"

- "But why!? We never spend time together!"

- "Yeah! Because you avoid me!"

- "It's weird, I did nothing!"

- "Can you stop and just understand that I miss you and want to have you a bit for me!? You couldn't just sit next to me and eat in silence, like you always do!?" got upset the redhead.

Max lightly threw her fork in her plate and crossed her arms. She began to feel less guilty for kissing Lisa the day before, Jane had no compassion for her, not even a piece of affection, so why fighting!? It was useless. She was tired. She gave up. She didn't want to eat anymore so she took the two plates, put them in the kitchen, and went back in her room to call Gabrielle.

- "Hello?" answered Gabrielle.

- "Hey," told Max with a sharp tone.

- "Wow, what's wrong?"

- "Nothing, just Jane being Jane."

- "What happened?"

- "I wanted to eat with her, she thought it was a trap and became unbearable, so I gave up and left."

- "Don't be too hard, she is not really here, she doesn't understand the others' feelings."

- "I know! It became harder and harder, I don't know how many time I'm gonna handle it! (sighs with her mouth) I fucked up yesterday..."

- "Oh, what did you do!?"

- "You...you remember, uh, the pretty girl who works with me?"

- "(loudly inhaled of shock) Don't tell me you did what I think you did!?" asked quickly the black-haired girl.

- "...maybe..." answered Max with a higher voice than usual.

- "Oh no, no, no, no, no, no, no! You didn't!"
- "It's her who did, not me!"
- "But you didn't stop her, right!?"
- "I, I...no..."
- "Max!"
- "But I loved it, okay!? I didn't control it, just a bit affection, that's all I want!"
- "Did you think of Jane!? How are you gonna tell her this!?"
- "She doesn't need to know! And, I'm pretty sure if I kiss Lisa in front of her, she wouldn't even react!" stated angrily Max.
- "SHE IS SICK! She needs you on her side!"
- "I KNOW! But I'm not a nurse or a social assistant, okay!? Don't fucking judge me! If you're strong enough to bear it, good for you! I work all day at the restaurant with a bunch of assholes, when I come home, I want to hug my girlfriend and tell her how much I love her, but instead of that I've a crazy Jane who barely remember my presence! So yeah, I kissed Lisa, I fucking enjoyed it, and I'll certainly do it again!"

Max hung up on Gabrielle. She didn't want to hear her lecture her for just a kiss. She didn't tell her she was in love! She just wanted some affection, was it bad!? She was so upset that she didn't want to stay here. She took her stuff and went in the living-room to take her coat.

- "I'm going at work, but you don't give a shit anyway!"

Jane didn't react. Max left, slamming the door behind her, not caring if Jane would be scared or not. Why should she care!? Jane didn't care to know if she had a good day or not! Why should she be the one making effort!? Jane was making any! Why should she be the one taking care of Jane!? Jane wasn't taking care of her! No, no, she was tired, and all of this needed to end!

She was working only in four hours, so she took a walk in the city. On her way to nowhere, she saw Moussa at a coffee shop and decided to greet the man.

- "Hey Moussa!"

- "Hey Max, how are you?"

- "I've...been better...what about you?"

- "Same. Bev began to yell at me because there was too much salt in her plate, so I left, to give her time to calm down. Jane?"

- "She didn't understand why I wanted to spend time with her! I left too...I kissed a girl yesterday..." confessed Max.

- "Oh..."

- "You're not gonna say something?"

- "No...well, I feel bad for Jane, but Jane isn't Jane, you're frustrated, I kinda understand why you did it...I feel bad for Jane because Jane is my friend..."

- "I know...I'm sorry..."

- "It's fine. Do you...do you love her?"

- "Who? Jane or Lisa?"

- "Um...Lisa."

- "I don't think...it was just like that, and...I liked it..."

Moussa nodded while Max lighted on a cigarette.

- "You think I'm a slut, right?"

- "Never. I know what you're living, I understand more than you think..." told Moussa, looking down at his coffee cup.

- "Did you..?"

- "Nah, but a boy flirted with me last week, and I can't stop thinking of it. But I love Bev..."

- "And I love Jane, but they are not the girls we fell in love with...not anymore...I don't remember when the last time I had a conversation with Bev was...talking about skateboard, and the movies coming out the next year, choosing which ones we were going to see together...when I was in Italy, she called me every time there was a movie; she wanted to know if it was coming out the same day, like that, I could see it in Italy, and her here, and then she would call me to talk about it..." told Max with a smile full of nostalgia.

- "She used to go with Jane, and then, Jane asked me if I wanted to come with them...I met Bev thanks to her," added Moussa.

- "Yeah, I remember when she called me because she was stressing for your first date."

- "I thought she was gonna pass out!" lightly chuckled the black man.

- "You were her first date, ever! She didn't want to ruin it," smiled the redhead.

- "And she didn't! We're still together now!"

The two friends nodded and smiled to each other. Talking about the past like that pinched their hearts. They were missing the good old days.

- "I don't know what to do..." sighed Max.

- "About?" frowned Moussa.

- "About Lisa. I don't wanna hurt Jane, she doesn't deserve another pain, and...I don't know, it's kinda unfair to...have fun while she is suffering."

- "I understand, but, because they're not feeling good doesn't mean we have to stop living."

- "You're not helping."

- "I know."

Max and Moussa tried to keep a serious face, but both lost it, and burst in laugh.

- "I'm sorry, but I have to go," told Max with a big smile.

- "Yeah, me too! Without Jane, I'm the one who have to fill the files!"

- "Hard!"

Max stood and said goodbye to Moussa before going to her work. She spent the night avoiding Lisa, her eyes, or her discreet invitations. When the night was over, she walked in front of her without saying a word, preferring going back to her apartment with a clear conscience.

13. The present

Jane could finally go back to work, relieving Max. The brunette didn't want to go back to work, staying in her apartment for two weeks gave her a feeling of safety that she didn't want to lose. But Moussa forced her, he was sure their boss would take it as a pretext to fire her, and the boy thought that working could help her to feel better, to keep her mind active and occupied. When they arrived, Moussa bought her a coffee and accompanied her to her desk. On their way they met some of their colleagues.

- "Hey Dyke, we let you a present at your desk for your return," smiled too much one.

- "Something you can't not like," added another one with the same proud tone.

- "Don't play with it right now, we don't really wanna see that," told another one holding his big smile.

The three walked away, laughing, proud of themselves. Moussa made a movement with his head to tell her to ignore them before keeping moving. Once in the office, they saw a prostitute at Jane's desk, waiting.

- "That's all!? Damn, they're so childish!" stated Moussa with an annoyed tone.

Every time one of them was arresting a prostitute they were "giving" her to Jane, to mock her sexuality and force her to make another file. Jane sat in her chair without looking at the woman in front of her, opening the file on her desk.

- "What's up, Dyke?" told the prostitute.

Jane didn't react, too used to hearing it.

- "Hey Slut, I asked you something!"

Jane raised her eyes and looked at the woman. She didn't know why she was calling her like that, certainly her colleagues who told her to

do that.

- "You don't recognize me, right?"

The brunette frowned, trying to know why she was insisting, and shook her head to say no.

- "Well, I'm kinda surprised, we had some good moments in High School," smirked the prostitute.

Jane felt hit by an arrow. The make-up made her look different, but the tone, the voice, the proud expression on her face, it could be only her.

- "Abigail!?"

- "Indeed Dyke!"

Jane couldn't believe it. She thought she would become crazy, but she was just angry, like usual. She didn't really care anymore, nothing mattered. She just looked down at her file, ignoring her and filling it properly.

- "So, Jane, you like our present?" mocked a man.

- "You haven't (moves his hips like if he was having sex) fucked her yet!?" added another one.

Jane closed her fist on her plastic cup, covering her hand with her hot coffee.

- "Aww, she is angry, bouhou..." mocked one of her colleagues, faking crying.

- "What are you gonna do, Dyke? (approaches her, bends next to her, and pushes many time her head with his finger) Punching us like you did with your friend!?"

It was exactly what she had in her mind. She quickly turned her head and grabbed the finger with her teeth, tightening her jaw; while she stood, she grabbed his head and hit her desk multiple times with his face. She opened her mouth, freeing his hand, and dropped him on

the floor. The man's face was covered of blood. His friend tried to intervene, but Jane punched him in his stomach before kicking his balls and hitting his face with her knee. She took another one by his neck, sinking her nails in his skin, and punched him, again and again, without stopping, seeing all red, not feeling her hand getting hurt. She just wanted them to get hurt. To feel what she was feeling, but it was impossible.

Moussa managed to block her arms against her body and to bring her outside the office, even if she was struggling and yelling at him to let her go.

- "You're lucky to still have your finger!" stated Abigail with a smile.

Moussa let Jane near the cells and told her to take a breath, before going back near the desks. The Lieutenant was out his office, furious.

- "Put her in a cell," ordered the man.

- "No! They should be the ones in cells!" answered Moussa.

- "You're kidding!? She fucking broke my teeth!" replied one on the floor with blood running from his mouth.

- "You deserved it! She fucking has PTSD, and you all play with her like if it was a fucking game! She went in Somalia because police stations were favoring former soldiers and refusing girls in their districts! She is smarter and stronger than all of you reunited! She is just tired to be treated like if she was nothing! You have no respect, this is YOUR problem, but don't fucking cry because she broke your fucking dirty teeth!"

- "Officer Lewis!" intervened the Lieutenant. "Enough! You place her in a cell to calm her, it's an order!"

- "Or what!? You're gonna fire me!? Do it! You want it since the first day! I won't put my best friend in a cell because three assholes thought it was funny to mock her sexuality once again!"

Moussa left the room without looking at them. He didn't care of the consequences, he was done with people focused on themselves without caring of other people's emotions! They weren't even

considered as people, they were just...toys to distract them. He arrived again near the cells, Jane in front of an empty one, staring into space with a tear falling on her cheek. He sat next to her and began to clean her shaking hand.

- "They're always laughing..." sighed Jane.

- "I know, it's annoying," answered Moussa with an irritated tone.

- "It's not even funny...Why are they laughing..?"

- "They're assholes!"

- "Too loud..."

- "What?" frowned the black man.

- "It's too loud..."

Moussa stopped talking. He wasn't sure if they were talking of the same thing, Jane didn't seem to be really here, and she was sweating a lot.

- "What, what's too loud?"

- "The rebels..."

Jane had a small start and began to look around with a frown and lost eyes, before stopping on her friend.

- "Why I'm here?" asked the girl.

- "You, you don't remember?"

- "Remember what!?"

- "Davidson, Johns, and Wilson mocked you again, and you punched them."

- "Oh..."

- "You remember?"

- "Yeah...I should go home, it's already late."
- "You just arrived," frowned Moussa. "It's just 8."
- "8!? P.M.!?"
- "No, A.M., are you okay?"
- "Yeah, yeah...I'm just...a bit lost..."
- "I see...I should bring you some water."
- "No, no, I'm fine, I'm fine."
- "Okay. You come back when you're ready, okay?"
- "Yeah, okay..."

Moussa stood and let her alone. He was beginning to feel uncomfortable in those situations. He was used to it, with Jane at work and Bev at home, but it was like if he was overdosing it, he couldn't handle it anymore, too hard to see. He went back at his desk -his hurt colleagues gone- and sat, ignoring the others looking at him.

- "Hey, Choc'late," called Abigail in a whisper.
- "It's Officer Lewis," answered the man.
- "Yeah, whatever! Can you free me, now!? I did nothing! I was just working!"
- "You're not my file."
- "Come on, Jane will never let me go!"
- "And we both know why! You're like them!"
- "Look, I know I did bad things to her, but it's past, we both have our own lives now, and keeping me here won't change what happened."
- "Yeah, but what happened changed her."
- "It changed me too."

The two stopped talking. Abigail knew it was useless, this guy was on Jane's side, no matter what, and she couldn't blame him for this.

None of his colleagues reappeared, which didn't bother him, and his boss didn't fire him for yelling at everyone. Moussa wasn't surprise, even if he was black, he was still one of the best of the district. Jane finally came back.

- "Hey Jane, come on, you can free me now!" told Abigail.

Jane sat at her desk without looking at her.

- "Where were you?" frowned Moussa.

- "I walked."

- "What!? For three hours!?"

- "Three hours!? I, I thought I walked for thirty minutes...Three hours? You're sure?"

- "Yeah! It's almost lunch time!"

- "Oh...I, I didn't realize I walked this much."

- "BROWN!" called the Lieutenant from his office.

The girl sighed before standing and joining him. Everyone could hear their boss yelling at her, but none of them understood what he said. Abigail couldn't believe she spent an entire night in this office, waiting for someone to let her out! And seeing Jane after all this time made it weirder; she was a nutcase now!

Jane left the office with her usual serious face and went back to her desk where she began to take back her stuff.

- "You're leaving?" frowned Moussa.

- "I'm suspended," answered Jane.

The brunette took her keys and freed Abigail.

- "Thanks. Asking for a ride is too much?" asked the blonde woman.

Jane rolled her eyes as an answer.

- "I was just asking!"

- "Just leave, that's what you wanted," told Jane.

Abigail sighed and stood.

- "I bring you back home," said Moussa, standing and taking his stuff.

- "I can walk," answered Jane.

- "You've walked enough for today."

- "Your car doesn't have only two seats, right?"

- "Abigail, just leave! Do I have to remind you that I hate you!?"

- "I won't talk! But with those shoes I'm gonna need two days to be back at my apartment!"

- "Then leave now if you don't wanna lose too much time."

Moussa began to leave, followed by Jane, but Abigail decided to insist.

- "Come on, Jane, just one ride, you'll never hear about me again after! I'm wearing my work clothes, people are gonna insult me!"

- "Welcome to my world," replied sharply Jane.

- "Look, (grabs her arm to stop her and forces her to look at her) I know I did horrible things to you, and I regret it, all of them, there is not a day when I don't hate me for this, I'm sorry, I really am."

Jane didn't answer, but she kept staring at her with her angry eyes. She seemed honest, and it was pissing her off. She quickly freed her arm, looked at Moussa, before taking the stairs.

- "It was a no, right?" asked Abigail with a bit despair in her voice.

- "It wasn't," said Moussa. "Let's go."

Abigail didn't know if they were mocking her or not, but she didn't want to miss her chance. Moussa invited her to go first and followed her. They arrived in the parking lot, Jane waiting next to his car. The three adults were now inside, Moussa starting the car and driving away.

- "You're still with Max?" asked Abigail.

- "Yeah," sighed Jane.

- "Nice, couple goals. She always cared about you, more than herself."

Jane rolled her eyes and looked outside.

- "She threatened me one day, after you yelled at me because I talked to you about our dead sisters. It worked, she scared the shit out of me! I never messed with her, well, a bit but not that much, too dangerous. She has balls."

- "I thought you weren't supposed to talk," told Moussa.

- "Yeah, but I thought you would talk, it's completely dead here!"

- "We don't always have something to say," answered Jane.

- "Well, I've things to say! I haven't seen you for years now!"

- "And you missed me!?" scoffed Jane.

- "Missing you is a bit too much, but I thought a lot about you."

- "You're a dyke now!?"

- "No," chuckled Abigail. "I wanted to apologize to you, and I did, I'm happy now."

- "Good for you."

- "You went to the anniversary?"

- "Yeah."

- "How was it?"

- "Dunno."
- "You don't know? You went or not?"
- "Yeah I went, not a long time," told Jane.
- "You saw old friends?" asked Abigail.
- "I saw Troy and his boyfriend."
- "Boyfriend? I knew he was gay, it was the only reason he didn't care about me."
- "Of course, what else?" said ironically Jane with a serious tone.
- "I'm perfect, nobody can resist me," smirked the blonde girl. "Is he happy?"
- "I don't know."
- "Wow, Jane, you're really caring about other people around you!"

Jane didn't answer, she just sighed -with her nose- of annoyance. Abigail didn't continue the conversation, getting the message.

They arrived on an abandoned parking lot, in front of a building with a porn video club, a sex shop, and a strip tease club. It was dilapidated and holding by the power of God.

- "They're all looking at us," stated Moussa.
- "You're two cops, plus, a black cop and a girl cop, you're rare species!" answered Abigail.
- "You live there?" asked Jane.
- "Yeah, well, above the sex shop."
- "Alone?"
- "Sometimes. It's a friend's apartment, I stay in there until he came back. Thanks for the ride, have good lives."

Abigail left the car, going in direction of the building, letting Moussa and Jane alone. The man didn't drive off, seeing that something was bothering Jane.

- "What's wrong?" asked Moussa.

- "Nothing," answered Jane scratching her chin.

The man stayed a moment looking at her until Jane decided to go out of the car. Moussa decided to follow her. They entered the sex shop and were welcomed by a young girl behind the counter loudly chewing gum and reading a magazine.

- "The blonde girl who just entered, where is she?" asked firmly Jane.

- "Why you fucking care!?" replied the lady, looking up at them.

Moussa and Jane had the same idea. They both took off their badges from their pockets and showed them to her.

- "Upstairs, first door on the right," answered the woman showing the curtain behind her.

The two cops nodded to thank her before walking through the plastic dicks and going behind the curtain. They arrived in front of the door, hearing yells from inside. Jane was going to knock, but a man in a dirty white tank top and black sportswear opened the door.

- "Who the fuck are you!?" snapped the man.

Moussa and Jane both showed him their badges.

- "Hey! I don't wanna problems bros, it's her, not me!"

- "Leave," ordered Jane with a deep voice.

The man didn't hesitate and ran in the stairs.

- "You were already missing me?" told Abigail with tears in her eyes.

- "You're okay?" asked Moussa.

- "Amazing, don't you see!?"

The blonde girl walked to her table, taking a tissue to wipe her make-up falling on her cheeks. Jane and Moussa both slowly entered the room. It was a messy place. There were dirty plates a bit everywhere, some covered with old clothes. The couch was broken, inclining on the right. The kitchen was small and gross. And the room was small, with only one door giving on the bathroom. But the smell, it was the only thing that Jane remembered. It was smelling weed, sex, but especially cigarettes. They were blowing their smoke on her face and laughing, again and again, loudly, mocking her, hurting her.

- "Jane? Are you okay?" asked Moussa with a concerned tone.

He put his hand on her shoulder, making her start.

- "You should maybe wait outside."

- "No, I'm fine," affirmed Jane.

- "Why are you even here!? You wanna witness my failure!? Now that you see it, you can leave! I've the life I deserve!" told Abigail with tears falling on her cheeks.

- "You wanna stay here!?"

- "I've nowhere else to go!"

- "Take your stuff, all your stuff."

- "What!? You're not gonna put me in jail!"

- "I'm not. I've a place for you, it's now or never."

- "Wh-What? Wh-Why? I bullied you! I treated you like shit! Why you wanna help me!?"

- "Just take your stuff, I don't have all day."

- "Yes you have! You're suspended!" stated Moussa.

Jane rolled her eyes and shook her head, before leaving the apartment, not supporting the smell anymore. Moussa helped Abigail to pack her stuff and accompanied her to his car where Jane was.

- "You've everything?" asked Jane.

- "I think, yes," answered shyly Abigail.

Jane nodded and went inside the car. Abigail and Moussa looked at each other, not really knowing what she had in her mind, before doing the same thing. Moussa understood quickly her idea, but he knew someone wasn't going to like it. He let them in front of a building before going back to work. Abigail followed Jane without talking, a bit worried of this new place. It wasn't the kind of place where she was used to going. Jane opened a door without knocking, entered, and stopped in the living-room, looking at the open room on her left. Abigail shyly entered with her bags in her arms and admired the clean and wide living-room, before stopping next to Jane.

- "You're already here!?" frowned Max at the kitchen table. "And you brought me a prostitute, it's nice but I'm not really interested. Can I have an explanation!?"

- "I'm suspended."

- "WHAT!? After only a few hours!? Breaking Lucas's jaw wasn't enough!? What did you do!?"

- "It doesn't matter."

- "When you are fired, it'll matter!"

- "I don't care."

- "Fine! Do what the hell you want! And have fun with your new friend!"

- "It's Abigail."

- "I don't give a fuck about her name!"

- "You didn't listen. It's Abigail."

Max's jaw dropped. She looked at Jane, then Abigail, then Jane, and finally Abigail. She frowned to see better, but it was THE Abigail.

- "You're kidding, right!?"

- "No."

- "No, of course not! You haven't make a joke for months so why now!? You're serious right now! **YOU'RE FUCKING SERIOUS RIGHT NOW!**" got angry the redhead who stood. "You couldn't call to ask my opinion!? Of course not! You certainly forgot I was living here too!"

- "I don't need to ask you who can stay here or not!"

- "No, of course not! I'm just here to prepare you food and to help you with the bills!? That's what I am for you!? That's how you see me!?"

Jane rolled her eyes and sighed with her nose, upsetting more Max. The redhead decided to go closer to her girlfriend, to see what was in her eyes.

- "I'm sorry, maybe I embarrassed you in front of your new friend!? If I see Alban walking in New-York streets, I'll ask him if he wanna drink a coffee at home! Oh no! I've a better idea! What about your step-father!?"

- "Stop it," told angrily Jane between her teeth, and closing her fists.

- "He would be certainly happy to see you after all this time, maybe he could humiliate you one more time!?"

- "Stop it!" continued the brunette, her face getting red and pressing her temples.

- "Like good old days! And we could invite the assholes who **FUCKING RAPED AND KILLED LOREN!**"

Jane felt electricity inside her, like if it was burning. She slapped Max with her handback without knowing it. It made a loud noise, shocking the three girls. Max put her hand on her red cheek, her mouth full opened and her eyes full of tears. Abigail was hiding behind her arms, not believing what she just witnessed. Jane seemed terrified and surprised, looking at her shaking hand like if it wasn't hers.

- "You went too far. I'm fucking done with you!" stated Max.

The redhead left the kitchen and slammed the door going to the corridor. Abigail didn't remember being this scared of a person like that before. She couldn't move and apparently Jane couldn't move either. Her hand was shaking so much that the blonde girl wondered if she didn't have Parkinson.

- "Jane? Are you okay?" tried shyly Abigail.

- "I, I don't know...What happened?"

- "You just slapped Max."

- "No, no, no...no, I didn't, I can't do that...I didn't, it wasn't me...it wasn't me..."

- "You should sit, you're a bit pale."

Abigail hesitated, but she grabbed Jane's arm to help her to sit on the floor. The brunette couldn't move her eyes from her hand, thinking someone else took control of her own body. The blonde girl didn't know what to do, she had never been in this kind of situation before! She didn't know if she should help Jane, or see if Max was fine, even if she was packing her stuff to leave. She took a deep breath and opened the fridge. She found two bags of peas and put them in two dish towels. She sat next to Jane and placed one on her hand.

After a moment in an awkward silence, Max reappeared. She had red puffy eyes and seemed calmer. She walked to Jane -who was looking at her with her wet apologetic eyes- and held out a blue prospectus to her. Jane shyly took it and casted a glance at it.

- "We're going there next month," told Max.

- "Uh...okay," answered Jane who was still shocked.

The redhead noticed the ice on her table, took it, and placed it on her hurting cheek, before making a movement with her head to Abigail. The blonde girl frowned but stood and followed Max behind the door.

- "Here, (shows the door on her left) it's Jane's bathroom, don't use it, but here (shows the door next to it) it's mine, you can use it, but not when I'm inside, obviously, (they arrive at the end of the corridor in front of a door. The corridor was in fact continuing on the right with two doors facing each other) this, (shows the door on the right) this is Jane's room, and this, (shows the door in front of it) it's mine."

Abigail nodded, not really sure why she was telling her all of this. Max opened the door where they stopped and invited Abigail to enter.

- "This is your room," told Max with no smile.

- "My room?" asked the blonde girl.

- "Yes. As Jane decided to give you a chance, which I still don't understand, you have a room to stay."

- "You have three rooms," stated Abigail with an impressed tone.

- "Yes, for all the friends we don't have anymore."

- "I, I don't know what to say...it's, it's too much..."

- "Yeah, that's what I think too."

- "I'm sorry...I didn't want to...create a fight..."

- "You didn't. It's like that every day. But, I'm gonna be clear. I don't wanna hear you, I can barely watch you, I still don't know how I didn't smack your face yet! You're a mouse, you're even smaller than a mouse, if you need anything, just don't!"

- "You're not together anymore?"

- "You really think I wanna talk about it with you!?"

- "No, of course not...it's just, you were so in love before..."

- "Yeah well, I arrived at a point where just holding her hand could give me an orgasm."

Abigail had a surprised and dazed expression while Max was in direction of the corridor.

- "Max, wait!" called Abigail.

The redhead stopped without turning.

- "Thank you..."

- "Yeah...no problem..."

She slammed the door. Even if Max was cold with her, Abigail was happy to be here. She never thought one second that Jane would take her to her own apartment, knowing Max wouldn't like it. And the room was so beautiful, and it was smelling good, and the bed was so comfy. She knew it was a good thing.

Max went back to her room, letting Jane alone. The redhead called Moussa and Gabrielle, telling them about the therapy. The two had the same idea and called to book the same weeks. It was the only solution to know what happened to them.

Max was feeling a bit guilty for what happened. She provoked her in purpose, talking closely to her to make her smell the odor of the cigarette she smoked before she arrived. She wanted an excuse to leave, she was tired of all of this, not seeing a damn light to this. But, while she was packing, she saw the prospectus that Troy gave her and thought it was her last hope. Maybe it would work. She wanted it to work. It had to work.

14. Guilt

Abigail spent her first night in Max and Jane's apartment and strangely felt good. The apartment was wide, everyone had, sadly, their own room, a cleaned kitchen, and they had two bathrooms! She heard some lively noises and deduced it was Max. She didn't slam doors this time, which was pleasant. Abigail stayed in her bed with a big smile. At least, she knew that neither Jane nor Max would bother her or assault her. It was a safe place. Once quiet, the blonde girl decided to leave her room. Max just left, and Jane was certainly still in her room. She had this beautiful apartment just for herself, but she didn't dare to do anything. She quickly used the bathroom, just in case Max forgot something and showed up by surprise. After a relaxing shower, seeing that there was still nobody, she went in the kitchen to eat something. There was a note on the table.

- "Abigail. Be sure Jane eats today, I work the entire day, I can't go back home to see how she is. The nurse is coming at around 3pm to clean Jane's wound. Eat what you want, I don't care. She didn't sleep last night, keep an eye on her. If she falls asleep, she will have a nightmare and scream. If it happens, calm her down, remind her where she is, and bring her some water. And don't make loud noises. If something happens to her, you're dead. Good luck."

The blonde girl smiled. She could do something for them to thank them. When she finished to read the paper, Jane appeared in the kitchen and sat at the table, hiding her face in her arms like to sleep more.

- "Hey Jane, you're good?"

She shrugged. Abigail put a friendly hand on her shoulder to comfort her, but the brunette made a brutal movement.

- "DON'T FUCKING TOUCH ME!"

- "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't wanna scare you! I just, I just wanted to help...I'm certainly not the right person for this..." said quickly the blonde girl.

Abigail stepped back, letting Jane alone and feeling guilty. She didn't know why she thought she could help her, their past was too filled with hatred that it couldn't work! She understood Jane's reaction, every time Abigail touched her in the past it was to hurt her.

Max arrived at her work. Even if she managed to avoid Lisa a few days, she didn't resist and fell in her arms again. She was feeling good with her, she couldn't control it! Lisa was funny, smart, interesting, and interested of what she was saying! Things which hadn't happened for a while now with Jane. And the slap the day before just made her feel less guilty for having good time. It was just kisses, but it was enough now for Max, she didn't want to go further with her.

After 6 hours, she decided to take her break to smoke. Lisa was still working, suiting the redhead, not wanting to see anyone. The slap totally shook her. She still couldn't believe it. She never thought one second that Jane could hit her! Okay, she provoked her, but she thought she would yell, as usual! Not slapping her! It...it hurt her so much...The pain in her heart was so unbearable that she thought it could stop beating at any moment.

- "Max? Are you okay?"

The redhead started. It was Lisa.

- "Yeah, yeah..." sighed Max, tapping her cigarette before taking a puff.

- "You don't seem okay. (sits next to her and rubs her back) What's wrong?"

- "Nothing, just...another fight."

- "You didn't leave her, right?"

- "No, I can't do that."

- "Why not? You're not happy with her," stated Lisa.

- "I know but, I still hope she can get better...I booked two weeks for a therapy, it's my last hope."

- "And if it doesn't work?"

- "I prefer not thinking of that..."

She knew what would happen. Jane was unable to live alone, and Max couldn't live like that forever. She would place her in a psychiatric hospital, it was the only solution. Thinking of it put tears in her eyes. She didn't want to see this relation ending, not like this, not because of this. Lisa noticed her sadness and leaned to kiss her cheek, making smile the redhead.

- "I hope I'm not interrupting something!?"

Max started again and turned her head to see Gabrielle with her arms crossed.

- "Shit Gab! You scared me!" told Max with an irritated tone.

- "Why!? You thought I was someone else!? Like Jane!?"

- "Don't be stupid, she can't go outside the apartment."

- "I see that you didn't lose your compassion!"

- "I should go," said shyly Lisa.

- "Yeah, you should!" replied Gabrielle.

The brunette didn't dare to kiss Max and quickly left, going back inside.

- "When did you come back!?" asked Max.

- "This morning. I transferred Lucas to the Good Red Heart Hospital."

- "How is he?"

- "Better. He should be able to talk in the next days, well, if he cooperates!"

- "You wanna hear something...unbelievable?"

- "Impress me!" sighed the black-haired girl, sitting next to her.

- "Jane offered our guest room to a prostitute!"
- "Really!? It's pretty nice, in fact, right?"
- "Yeah, but it's not just anybody! It's Abigail!"
- "Abigail?" frowned Gabrielle. "Wait, THE Abigail!?"
- "Yep."
- "No way! But why!?"
- "I have no fucking idea!" chuckled Max.
- "That's, that's so improbable!" lightly giggled Gabrielle. "There must be a good atmosphere at home!"
- "I kinda blew a fuse."
- "I'm not surprised! I would have certainly killed her!"
- "I wanted to! And I still want to! I can't believe I have to see her face every day now!"
- "Because you let her stay!?"
- "Yeah...Don't ask me why because I don't know! Maybe she could be useful! Maybe Jane saw something in her...I didn't have the force to fight her yesterday, I said horrible things to Jane, it was hard enough..."
- "Oh...what happened?"
- "I, I was tired, and I wanted this to end, so I provoked her to make her mad and give me a reason to leave without feeling guilty but...I went too far...and seeing Abigail didn't help! I proposed her to invite the assholes who raped and killed her first girlfriend..."
- "What!? What the fuck!? That's so wrong!"
- "I know! I didn't think, it came out...just like that! And...she slapped me..."

- "Oh no!" exclaimed Gabrielle, placing her hands on her mouth to hide her shock.

- "I wanted to leave, I began to pack my stuff, but I saw the therapy, and, I don't know, it gave me hope, so I gave her a last chance...that's why I called you and Moussa, I knew you would do the same thing, we can't keep going like that! It can't work!"

- "Yeah...Why didn't you tell me?"

- "Because, it was my fault, I deserved it, I'm the sane brain, I shouldn't say things like that! It was stupid, just because I wanted to run away from her!"

Gabrielle wrapped her arm around her and put her head on her shoulder.

- "How is she?" asked softly Gabrielle.

- "Bad. She is in the down part of the rollercoaster..."

- "Depression?"

- "I guess...when she is up she is angry, I don't know which part I prefer! But, I'm sure something clicked when she slapped me, she regretted instantly."

- "It's a good thing, I'm sure this therapy will work, for all of us."

- "I hope you're right."

- "Me too, I don't really like this Lisa."

- "I know," chuckled Max. "I'm sorry, but I've to go back to work. Thanks for coming."

- "It's my pleasure."

The two girls hugged before separating. Max was glad to have Gabrielle with her, it was a support she needed, and she was sharing the same struggle with Lucas. She could understand how hard it was.

The day ended, and the redhead was finally arriving at her home. When she opened her door, she saw Abigail in her couch, watching TV.

- "Why are you on my sight!?" told Max with an irritated tone.

- "Sorry, I didn't want...I just, waited for you, so I could go to work..."

- "To work!? (closes her door) Jane didn't bring you here to let you continue to prostitute yourself!"

- "But, I need money to eat and find another place...I don't think I can stay here...I can't help Jane, she...is it because of me?"

- "What is because of you!?"

- "Her pain, is she like that because of me?" asked Abigail with tears in her eyes.

- "You didn't help, for sure! But no, it's not because of you, even if I still think you're a fucking bitch!"

- "I know, and you have all the right to...I tried to comfort her this morning but...she didn't support my hand on her...I'm sure it brought her back bad memories..."

- "Don't worry, she is like that with everyone," stated Max.

- "Even with you?" frowned the blonde girl.

- "Especially with me."

- "Oh..."

- "She ate?"

- "A bit...I didn't want to force her too much, she was a bit...absent."

- "She got out of her room?"

- "Yeah, this morning, and this afternoon but just to go to the toilets. I, I tried to talk to her, but she ignored me, she walked like if I wasn't here, like if-"

- "Like if you were a ghost?" finished the redhead.

Abigail nodded.

- "Yeah...Welcome to my world!" said Max with no emotion. "Go to sleep, you waited enough."

- "You, you really want me to stay?"

- "No, of course not, but, at least, you can keep an eye on Jane, and you seem motivated to be forgiven. I'm sure you won't follow her in the forest, or assault her, or cut her damn chest with "SLUT" on it, or organized a rape in the locker room!"

Max didn't realize that she enumerated all of this with her voice getting angrier and angrier. Abigail felt a tear falling on her cheek, wanting to cry by just remembering everything she did.

- "Go to sleep, we're both tired," said Max with a small voice.

Abigail nodded with more tears falling. At least, Max was sure of the other girl's guilt. But the redhead felt a bit bad for provoking her like that, she was so tired that she was always irritated by everything and everyone! She took a deep breath, went to Jane's room to see if she was asleep -and she was- before doing the same, finally taking some rest.

15. Enemy's shoulder

One week passed. Jane barely got out of her room, Abigail was still there to watch her, and Max was doing her best to not break down and kill everyone. Max took a day off, preparing the papers for the therapy. She didn't know why they needed all this information, but she would give them anyway if it was the only solution to have help.

- "Do you need anything?" asked shyly Abigail.

- "Going back in the past and convinced Jane, Lucas, and Bev to not go in Somalia," answered Max without looking up.

- "I mean, something I can do because, I clearly can't do that."

Max had a small chuckle before playfully shaking her head. Even if she still had a problem with Abigail, at least someone was talking to her in this apartment.

- "You seem exhausted, you have big dark rings under your eyes, and...I hear you, in your room, when you...when you cry..."

- "Stop talking, you're gonna cheer me up!" said ironically the redhead.

- "I'm sorry, I'm just wondering how you are..."

- "Why?"

- "Because no one else does!"

Max stopped writing. Abigail was right, no one really asked her how she was without implying Jane, but, she didn't know how she was, she couldn't put words on it.

- "What changed your mind?" frowned the redhead.

- "About?"

- "About dykes and all those kind of diseases?"

- "You."

- "Me?"

- "Yeah, I mean, I never understood how two girls could love each other, and I didn't want to because for me, it was just wrong, it was not even human...But, every time Jane was hurt by me, or the others, you were there for her, taking care of her, defending her, and when you threatened me, I saw in your eyes how important she was for you and...I wanted to be as important for someone as much as Jane was for you..." explained Abigail with tears in her eyes. "I just wanted someone to look at me the way you were looking at her or the way she was looking at you...You made me realize it..."

Max didn't answer. She didn't really know what to say; it was the first time she had had a serious conversation with Abigail since she knew her. She realized that, maybe, they weren't this different; Abigail didn't seem to be close to her family, she was all alone now, living with her favorite High School victim and her girlfriend. Something went wrong with her.

She just stood -needing a paper in her room- and gave friendly taps on the other girl's shoulder, with a small smile.

- "Thanks for your help," said softly Max.

Abigail wiped her tears, sniffed, and weakly smiled to her. Max went to her room to look for more information, letting the blonde girl alone. Abigail sat in the couch, trying to figure out what happened in her life to finish like that and wondering why she had the help of this two while she didn't deserve it at all! But a knock at the door cut her in her thoughts. She opened the door and saw a pretty girl with long brown hair.

- "Uh, hi," frowned Abigail.

- "Hi, are you Jane?"

- "No, I'm Abigail, and you? Who are you?"

- "I'm Lisa, I work with Max."

- "Oh! Okay, come in! She didn't tell me you were coming."

- "She doesn't know," said Lisa.

- "It's certainly why!"

Abigail invited the girl to sit in the couch.

- "I never heard about you, what kind of relation you have with them?" asked the brunette.

- "Oh, uh, it's complicated, we were in the same school, and...we didn't have good relation."

- "Why Max didn't tell me about you?"

- "Because she hates me, it's certainly why!" lightly chuckled the blonde girl.

- "She hates you!? And she lets you stay here!?"

- "Yeah, I can't believe it either!"

- "You're sure she hates you?" frowned Lisa with a suspicious tone.

- "There is no way for her to like me! Why do you wanna know that?"

- "For nothing."

The corridor door opened, and Max froze. She wasn't expecting Lisa to come here! She slowly closed her door, to not scare Jane, and quickly walked to her.

- "Why the fuck are you here!?" told angrily the redhead, keeping her voice down.

- "I wanted to see you!"

- "You could have waited for tomorrow!"

- "I'm tired to wait! And who's that!?" asked Lisa.

- "Who!? Abigail!? She just lives here, what does she have to do with

that!?"

- "I don't know, you let a girl you hate live with you, it's weird."

- "It's, it's none of your business! If I want to let her live here, I let her live here! You came to lecture me or what!?"

- "No. I wanna know who you're gonna choose."

- "What!? Choose who!?"

- "Between me and the person you call girlfriend!"

- "You're kidding, right!? I thought I was clear when I said we were going in therapy! There is still hope!"

- "There is no hope, Max! She is crazy!"

- "She is not crazy! She is...lost, and tired, she just needs help!" stated the redhead.

- "Fine! But I won't wait forever," said sharply Lisa.

- "I never said I was going to finish my life with you! I love her, okay? I always did!"

- "Oh yeah!? Why are you always crying then!? You're not happy with her, it's a fact! That's why you came to me!"

- "I didn't come to you, YOU came to me! I never said it was serious between us, it was just like that!"

- "Fine! You'll never see me again then!"

Lisa took her coat and left the apartment by slamming the door. Max was so angry that she followed her, opened her door, and yelled in the stairs:

- "YOU'RE NOT HALF THE WOMAN SHE IS!"

She wanted to slam the door, but she didn't want to scare Jane, so she closed it slowly, leaned against it, and slid on the floor.

- "Don't fucking dare to judge me," told Max with tears in her eyes, feeling her throat tightening.

- "I'm not up to judge anyone," said softly Abigail.

The redhead was so tired that she couldn't hold her tears. She tried the best she could, but there were too much. Abigail slowly approached and sat next to her.

- "I understand why you did it. You feel alone, the person you love doesn't know you exist, you're hurt by this, you need some affection, so you let the first girl interested in you give you this affection."

- "You're analyzing me now!?"

- "I knew you had someone else. You had a rest of her lipstick on your lips one day."

Max pouted. If Abigail noticed, Jane certainly did, well, if she had looked at her she would have noticed it.

- "I'm gonna hug you," said Abigail.

The redhead had a worried frown to her but let her do. It was weird at first, it was still THE Abigail! But she felt like if she needed it. It wasn't this bad, and Abigail seemed true in her words. Max let it go, she just cried on her worst enemy's shoulder, not handling anymore.

16. Waitress

The next day Max went back to work like if nothing happened. She began to trust Abigail and was feeling a bit more reassured to let Jane alone with her, even if it was still weird, and the hug the day before made it weirder. But she was feeling better now, maybe she needed it, but now, she had another problem, she didn't know how Lisa was going to react.

When she entered the kitchen, everyone was looking at her in silence. She felt awkward, but she went to her kitchen counter like if everything was normal. She could feel all their eyes on her, judging her, but she didn't care, since she was working here they were judging her.

- "What!? You suddenly all have a crush on me!?" replied the redhead.

They all shook their heads in disbelief before getting back to their work with sighs of disapproval. It could be only Lisa, it was her way to take her revenge. It was fine, she deserved it, and she didn't care. She heard the door of the dining room open and close, and turned to see a row of waitresses, all crossing their arms and looking at Max. The redhead wondered if she wasn't going to die today! By luck, their boss entered and intervened:

- "Stop acting like children, if Lisa can't separate professional and private life, it's not Max's fault, she made a choice, I don't want stupid quarrels in my kitchen! Am I clear!?"

- "Yes chef!" answered everyone.

- "Then go back to work!"

Everyone executed. The Chef approached Max and asked her to follow him in his office to talk privately.

- "As you may understand, Lisa resigned. I'm not here to blame you, what happened between you and her, it's not my problem, but now, I need a waitress."

Max began to worry and to feel anger growing. She was a girl, the best to do a girl's job!

- "You certainly understood what I mean."

- "Yes," answered Max between her teeth.

- "Change your clothes and join the others, unless you know someone who could replace Lisa, I'm aware of every propositions."

- "Okay."

- "I know you're disappointed, bu-

- "I'm fine."

She took her new outfit and went to the locker room to get ready. She couldn't believe it, all this story was wrong in every way! She felt so humiliated, she was demoted! Everyone was going to mock her more, and Lisa's friends were going to be awful with her, she knew it.

She didn't know how she did that, but she managed to stay nice with the customers and to smile to them. It wasn't their fault if she had problems, and she didn't want to have more. Even if her coworkers tried to trip her up many times, pushed her, and reproached her almost everything, she was still proud. She noticed that every plate that the customers were not liking were the plates she used to make, and at her kitchen counter was Adam, the one who got the promotion. She knew she deserved this promotion.

- "Too much salt Adam! It's the third plates that I bring back to you!" told Max.

- "I know! But it's not my plates, it's yours!"

- "I know!" smiled the redhead.

She took the three next plates and went back to the restaurant with a big smile, upsetting all her coworkers. Someone even asked her if they changed the Chef.

- "No, we have a new cook, he is doing his best but it's apparently not

enough," said Max with a big pleasure.

- "What happened to the one who used to cook those pastas? It was delicious before!" told the customer.

- "Well, she is serving you today."

- "It's you?"

- "Indeed Sir."

- "Well, you're an amazing cook and an amazing waitress, they are lucky to have you!"

- "I know!" answered the redhead with a joking tone.

She let them finish their meal before going back to the kitchen, smiling more than before. She wondered if she wasn't going to stay as a waitress after all, it was more gratifying. Well, in fact, what was more gratifying was the customers missing her and Adam not able to cook correctly. She knew exactly who she was going to ask to become the new waitress.

It was time for the break and Max joined Gabrielle as usual.

- "What happened to your clothes?" frowned the black-haired girl.
"You're wearing the same ones as the waitresses!"

- "Well, I'm a waitress today."

- "What!? Why!?"

- "You remember Lisa?"

- "That's bitch, yes."

- "We argued yesterday, she wanted me to choose between her and Jane-"

- "You chose Jane, right? Please, tell me you chose Jane!"

- "I did, relax! And she didn't really like it, so she certainly told everyone, and she resigned, so...I'm replacing her until there is a new

one."

- "I'm sorry...and I'm glad it's over with her."

- "Yeah, I'm glad too! She was a bit immature! But, it's not that bad, Adam is really bad today, and all the customers miss me, kinda cool," smiled Max.

- "Oh, that's great! You're gonna keep working as a waitress?"

- "No way, but I know who I'm gonna ask to."

- "You begin to like her, right?"

- "She changed, and, she helps me a lot with Jane, I don't know if she does that because she feels guilty or because she kinda like her and me...I don't know, but it doesn't matter."

- "Well, I still hate her for what she did to Jane," stated Gabrielle.

- "Me too! She hadn't seen how bad Jane was all this period! But Jane apparently forgave her, when people were bullying her, she even tried to help her!"

- "Jane is too good!"

- "Yeah, I know..." sighed Max.

- "You don't smoke today."

- "No! I'm trying to stop. Today is my day without cigarette."

- "It's great, I'm proud of you!"

- "Dyke! Break is over!" yelled one of the waitresses.

- "I have to go," pouted the redhead.

- "They seem so nice, how you can resist to not work with them!" joked the black-haired girl.

- "It's so hard!"

The two girls chuckled before separating and going back to their works. As it was the first time for Max to be a waitress, her Chef let her finish earlier to take some rest. When she arrived at her home, Abigail and Jane were at the kitchen table, the blonde girl reading one of Jane's magazines.

- "I thought you were wearing a white outfit when you work?" frowned Abigail.

- "Well, not today, as I wasn't in the kitchen but in the dining room serving customers!"

- "They demoted you!?"

- "Temporarily, until they find a new one. You have some experiences in this?"

- "What? Waitress?"

- "No construction painter, of course waitress!"

- "Uh...not that much, I worked in a bar once, but not that much."

- "It's still experiences. You would be interested?"

- "By the job? Of course I am! You're sure of you?"

- "I don't wanna be a waitress all my life because of...you know," told Max.

- "Then, I would love to! How can I thank you?"

- "Be a good waitress, 'should be enough."

They both had a small smile to each other. Max turned her head to her girlfriend and lightly touched the end of her nose, making her start.

- "You good?" asked Max.

- "Yeah, yeah..."

- "You eat today?"

- "She forced me," grumbled Jane.
- "She didn't really appreciate it," pouted Abigail.
- "It's fine, if she eats it's fine."
- "Yeah, she was okay today, she took a shower and put some clothes on. She watched me read her magazine."
- "It's great Jane, I'm proud of you," smiled Max.

Jane just quickly shrugged. She didn't know why she was still doing all of this, she just wanted to stay in her bed and do nothing! At least someone was happy! Because she was clearly not.

17. Coffee machine

The first days with Abigail as a waitress were complicated. The other girls were not very kind with her, and all the cooks tried to seduce her. They even tried to convince her that Max was awful and mean. But the blonde girl didn't let them tell things like that about the person who was giving her a place to stay and a new job. Now, Max had someone on her side in this kitchen.

But today was an important day. Jane and Max were about to leave the apartment to go in therapy for two weeks.

- "So, you remember everything I told you?" asked the redhead.

- "No parties, no betrayal, feed the cute cat, and clean at least one time before you come back, I'm fine, don't worry," smiled the blonde girl.

- "Don't look so happy to see us leave for two weeks."

- "I'm sorry, but the fact that you trust me enough to let me here for two weeks, it makes me...happy."

- "Yeah, it's just for the cat," joked Max with a serious tone.

- "Of course!" smirked Abigail. "You call me when you arrive?"

- "Yeah, if you want, but it's not gonna be before a long time!"

- "I know, six hours in a car, it's pretty long!"

- "Indeed!"

Jane arrived in the living-room with her backpack and her cat in her arms.

- "Hey Cat," said Max, caressing his head. "You know he is not coming, right?"

- "I know."

Jane approached Abigail and put the cat in her arms. Max noticed that Jane was really stressed by this trip, she was keeping her arms around her like if she wanted to hide her body. The redhead took a pillow on the couch and gave it to her, to allow her to tighten something. The two girls said goodbye to their new roommate and went to their car for a long ride.

They spent 8 hours in this car, Max was more than exhausted! It wasn't because of Jane because Jane didn't complain at all, but there were so many cars in the road, they stayed one hour without moving! But they finally arrived, relieving the two girls. They presented themselves to the reception and got the keys. The woman gave to Max a paper with instructions on it. They were beginning the next day with a confrontation of the three couples. She hoped it would be effective. When they arrived in their room, Max called Abigail to tell her they arrived, before installing everything.

- "You want the bed?" asked the redhead.

Jane shrugged, looking around.

- "I can sleep on this small couch if you want, you're too tall for it."

- "I don't care," said Jane with a worried tone.

- "Jane, it's gonna be okay, you know you can't stay like this forever."

- "I know, I still don't like it."

- "I know, you never liked facing your pain and emotions," stated Max.

- "I don't wanna face them either..."

- "Bev and Lucas?"

Jane nodded.

- "You know, you're all graves, maybe nothing will happen," tried to reassure the redhead.

But she hoped something would happen, she hoped she would know

a bit more about their problems. She let Jane alone in the room and decided to visit a bit the place. It was really beautiful, far from cities, in the middle of a forest. There were a pool, Jacuzzis, massages, a big restaurant, and more. On her way she saw Moussa and Gabrielle who were talking near a coffee machine. She took them in her arms to greet them.

- "You want a coffee?" proposed Moussa.

- "No thanks, if Jane smells coffee she will want one, and I would prefer her to reduce her consumption."

- "Yeah, good idea."

- "When did you arrive?"

- "This morning, we had driven all the night!" answered Gabrielle. "At least he slept, I was in peace!"

- "Yeah, we did the same thing," told Moussa. "And you?"

- "We just arrived, I should have done the same thing as you, it took us 8 hours to arrive!" explained Max.

- "Ouh, hard!" stated the black-haired girl. "I still can't believe they followed us!"

- "Well, Jane is all sheepish since she slapped me, it wasn't really hard, but she is really really stressing."

- "Same for Bev, well, she didn't slap me, but she is a bit weak and sad, she doesn't fight when I make a decision."

- "Sinclair was awful, but he still came! Certainly to upset Jane," pouted Gabrielle.

- "He came, it's all that matters, and tomorrow, maybe he will be the one who will begin the thing!" told Max.

Gabrielle and Moussa both nodded. They all wanted to know what was wrong with them, and they hoped it would be sooner than they thought.

18. The bridge

There were three brown leather sofas in a U. Gabrielle and Lucas were facing Max and Jane, while Moussa and Beverly were on the third line of the U, in front of the psychologist, all separated by a coffee table. The room was wide with many bookcases and big windows above the garden.

The atmosphere was awkward. Moussa, Gabrielle, and Max were sharing desperate eyes with each other. Lucas was killing with his eyes Jane who was looking away, while Beverly was looking down at her lap.

- "So," began the psychologist, "how are you all?"

No one really answered. Jane, Lucas, and Bev didn't react, while the three others just pouted, not really knowing how they were.

- "I'm going to explain why we are all here and what we are going to do. First, Ms. Marsh, Ms. Brown, and Mr. Sinclair, you all have PTSD further to several months in a hostile environment in Somalia. Since you're back in America, you have nightmares, flashbacks, uncontrollable anger, and depression. Today, we're beginning with a confrontation. I'm going to try to understand when everything went wrong with all of you by asking you questions and details about your last mission."

When the woman said that, Jane tensed her body, Bev had a faster breathing, and Lucas began to shake. It was apparently their last mission which traumatized them the most. Moussa, Max, and Gabrielle had the same spark of hope in their eyes, thinking this woman knew exactly what she was doing and would clear the situation.

- "You were sent, you and your team, to transport supplies to a town which had just been bombarded. How many were you?"

- "Ten."

- "Shut up, Bev!" ordered Jane.

- "I'm sorry...I'm so tired..."
- "I don't give a fuck! We're all tired!"
- "Leave her alone!" intervened Lucas. "This is your fault, not hers!"
- "No! This is not my fault! I didn't wanna use this road to avoid exactly what happened!"
- "And what happened?" asked the psychologist.
- "Nothing."

Jane leaned back on the couch, grabbed the pillow next to her, and hugged it. Lucas shook his head in disbelief in her direction, before leaning back too. The woman didn't continue immediately, giving them some time to calm down.

- "What was the problem with the first road?" she asked.

Jane clenched her jaw and looked away like a child, while Lucas just didn't react.

- "The bridge exploded," told Bev.
- "Enough Bev!" continued Jane.
- "No! I'm sorry for what happened, I really am, but I'm tired to have nightmares, to not be able to do anything without being terrified, to hurt Moussa without knowing it! I want and I need things to change! They took us here for a reason!"
- "We're fine! I'm fine!"
- "No you're not!" intervened Gabrielle. "None of you are! Even us! We're tired too! We don't support to see you like this! You don't hear your girlfriend cry every night because of you!?"
- "Max is fine!"
- "Yeah! She is so fine that she cheated on you!"

Max wasn't ready for this. She closed her eyes with a worried frown

and pinched her lips together, wanting to disappear. She didn't hear Jane answer and was scared to know why. When she opened her eyes, the brunette was leaned again on the couch, looking at Gabrielle with angry eyes.

- "You still think she is fine!?" insisted Gabrielle.

Jane looked down, still clenching her jaw and hugging the pillow.

- "I'm sorry..." apologized Max.

Jane just nodded.

- "We will talk about this during our private sessions, okay?" told softly the psychologist.

Max nodded. She wasn't expecting Gabrielle to tell her like that, but she knew it was because she was angry, so she wasn't mad at her. But she wondered why Jane wasn't mad, maybe she didn't care. She hoped it wasn't that.

- "The bridge exploded before you left, or after?"

- "While we were on it," continued Beverly with a shaking voice. "The first truck flew in the air and...rocks fell on us and Jordan's eyes exploded and there was blood everywhere and his bones were out of his own body!"

Beverly burst in tears. The room remained silent while the redhead was sobbing.

- "What happened next? Ms. Brown? Mr. Sinclair? One of you wants to continue?" tried the psychologist.

Lucas and Jane killed each other with their eyes without answering. They waited for Bev to calm down, knowing she was the only one who would tell the story.

- "We should take a break," proposed the woman.

At this words, Jane quickly stood and left the room by slamming the door. The psychologist left the room too. Bev started and cried more.

Lucas would have loved to leave the room too, but he couldn't, he had to wait for Gabrielle to put him in his wheelchair and to roll him outside! It was so annoying and humiliating. He couldn't stand this leg anymore!

- "What are you waiting for!?" asked aggressively Lucas.

- "I'm sorry, I didn't know you wanted to go outside..." apologized Gabrielle.

- "Why don't you do it yourself!?" replied Max.

- "I have no fucking leg!"

- "What about your left one!? And those two things on your torso that we call arms!? You just need to extend your arms to have your wheelchair! Stop being a baby and be a man for once!"

- "Fuck you, Max! You've no idea what I had to suffer!"

- "Then tell us!"

Lucas clenched his jaw and closed his fists. He hated when she was provoking him like that, she had no idea of what happened, and she dared to judge him!? No fucking way! He wouldn't let her win like that.

- "You're gonna help me or what!?" continued Lucas to Gabrielle.
"You're just a useless piece of shit!"

Moussa got enough. Seeing Gabrielle looking down, ashamed, and almost crying broke his heart. He stood, grabbed Lucas with one hand, and put him on his wheelchair.

- "What the fuck!? Not you!"

- "Why not!?" replied Moussa.

He grabbed the wheelchair and left the room, giving Gabrielle a break. The black-haired girl wiped her cheeks.

- "You're okay?" asked softly Max.

- "Yes...I don't think we'll know today..."

Max shrugged and showed Bev with a head movement.

- "I don't know..." said Gabrielle.

- "I hope."

- "Yeah...I need some air...You stay here?"

- "I won't let her alone."

- "Okay, see you."

Gabrielle stood, put a friendly tap on her friend's shoulder with a warm smile, and left the room. Max was alone with Bev. It had been a long time they hadn't spent time together. Max stood and sat next to her friend to see how she was.

- "Are you okay?"

- "No...I'm not..."

- "You will be," affirmed Max.

- "I'm not sure...I don't know how we can be okay after something like that..."

- "That's why we are here, right?"

- "I never wanted that," cried Bev.

- "I know."

- "It's all my fault, she is gonna hate me forever, and I can't blame her for this!"

- "Who? Jane? She can't hate people, she invited Abigail to stay at our apartment so, I don't think she will hate you forever!"

- "But, I did worse!"

- "What? What did you do?"

- "I...I can't tell...she will hate me more..."

Max didn't insist; Bev was feeling bad enough, she didn't need more pressure on her.

Moussa took Lucas in a break room provided for crisis like this. He placed him at a window and sat next to him. Lucas calmed down, but he was still very angry.

- "You couldn't stay with your crazy girlfriend!?"

- "She is fine, but Gab is not. She needed a break," told calmly Moussa.

- "Why don't you mind your fucking ass!?"

- "Gab is my friend, if she is hurt, I'm hurt, and I'm tired to see her let you hurt her because you make her feel guilty for what happened to you."

- "I don't care," mumbled Lucas.

- "But I do care. You're not okay, and I can understand why, but blaming her the way you did won't bring back your leg."

The psychologist knocked at the door, cutting their conversation, to tell them they would start again.

When Gabrielle left the room of the therapy, she went a bit further and found another room empty. Well, almost. Jane was there, taking support on a table and looking at her cup of coffee with empty eyes. The black-haired girl closed the door, bringing back Jane to reality.

- "Sorry, I didn't wanna scare you," apologized Gabrielle with red puffy eyes.

Jane nodded and looked again at her cup of coffee. Gabrielle could see that she was shaking, she was certainly trying to calm down by focusing on her black liquid.

- "Are you okay?" asked softly the black-haired girl.

- "I'm fine!" answered sharply Jane.

Gabrielle slowly walked to her and half-sat on the table, looking at Jane. The brunette didn't seem really here; she was shaking more, breathing heavily, and she seemed a bit stressed.

- "Jane?" tried Gabrielle. "Jane!?"

- "What!?"

- "What, what Bev told us...is there more?"

- "THIS IS NOT YOUR FUCKING BUSINESS!" yelled Jane, hitting the table with the palm of her left hand.

Gabrielle started but didn't fade. She was kinda sure that Jane wouldn't hurt her; slapping Max was already too much for her.

- "You, you don't think that talking about it would free you?"

- "I can't!" answered Jane between her teeth.

- "Why?"

- "I JUST CAN'T!"

Jane took her cup of coffee and threw it on the wall, before brutally turning the table over and punching the wall, making a hole. Gabrielle wasn't sure if Jane would hurt her or not, but it was scary. The brunette stopped moving, her fist still in the wall with some drops of blood flowing, looking down and breathing heavily.

- "Come on Jane, we'll take care of it," told softly Gabrielle.

Jane nodded, took back her hand, and followed Gabrielle outside to the nurse. On their way, they saw the psychologist who told them it would start again.

19. The road

Max, Bev, Moussa, and Lucas were back in the room with the psychologist when Gabrielle and Jane finally reappeared.

- "What happened to your hand!?" murmured Max.

- "Nothing."

- "That's why you have another bandage!"

- "I punched a wall, okay!? You're happy!?"

Max frowned to Gabrielle who just shrugged and pouted. The psychologist summarized what happened before the break, to be sure everyone agreed with this version. But, this time, everybody stayed quiet, even Beverly. The woman tried to make them talk, but they didn't say a word, lost in their thoughts, so she waited a moment before continuing:

- "What happened to the people in the other truck?"

- "They died," replied sharply Jane.

- "So, you were just four after this? You, Mr. Sinclair, Ms. Marsh, and Jordan?"

- "Five," corrected Lucas.

- "Who was the fifth?"

- "Daniel."

- "Okay, five, I note that. What happened next?"

Lucas and Jane didn't answer. They both looked at each other before watching Bev and looking away.

- "So what!? You're not gonna answer anymore!?" intervened Max a bit tired and upset by all of this.

- "We don't have to answer!" replied Jane.
- "Yes you have! They won't stop until you answer!"
- "We can say nothing for two weeks."
- "You don't wanna feel better!? You wanna stay hurt and sad and angry all your life!?" intervened Gabrielle.

Jane didn't answer. She leaned back on the couch and took the pillow next to her to hug it, before looking down. Max didn't like seeing her like that, she wanted to be the one hugging her to comfort and reassure her, but she couldn't.

- "I went in there, to see if there were survivors," told Lucas. "They were trying to help Jordan and to stop his hemorrhages, but he was losing too much blood. I tried to find the aid kit in the truck but...it was, it was a real mess inside..."

The boy stopped talking, staring into space with a terrified expression, breathing heavily and shaking.

- "What did you do?" asked gently the psychologist.
- "Nothing...I couldn't do anything..."

Lucas ran to the broken truck, his feet burning on the sand. As he was coming closer, he saw blood flowing from bodies, shredded flesh, and snatched members. He felt his heart in his throat, thinking he was going to throw it up. He took deep breathes, trying to calm down, and opened a door. A soldier's head fell on his side, eyes opened, looking at him with no soul inside. Lucas had a long and brutal start, managing to not scream, and froze. His eyes were going deep in his, like if he could possess his body and taking his soul away.

- "Lucas!" called Jane knelt next to Jordan's body with her hands on him. "He is dead, what about the others?"

Beverly, next to her, tapped her to have her attention and showed him with her head. Jane turned and saw that he was under shock. She stood and quickly walked to him with her body covered of blood.

- *"(snaps in front of his face) Hey, hey! Look at me! Lucas, look at me! Good. You're here? You're okay?"*

- *"Why are you like this?" asked Lucas with difficulties, a bit out of breath.*

- *"Like what!?"*

- *"Like if everything was normal! I'm the one who always wanted to be a military, but you're the one who seems born to do this! I don't understand!"*

- *"Maybe it's not your thing."*

- *"Maybe..."*

- *"Try to think of after, when you're back home, sitting on your couch with your pretty girlfriend next to you to take care of you, okay?" said Jane.*

- *"You, you think of her? I mean, Max, not Gabrielle," asked Lucas.*

- *"Of course I think of her, it's the only way for me to not completely lose my mind!"*

- *"I don't know if we're gonna make it..."*

- *"It's not the moment to weaken, okay!? You've more experiences than us, you're supposed to be the one to stay strong, so pull yourself together!"*

Jane gave two light punches with her fists on his chest before going back with Beverly, Daniel, and Jordan's body.

The psychologist nodded. They seemed to be close before, she wondered what happened to break this friendship down.

- *"You had to find a new road after, right?"*

- *"Yeah," said Lucas.*

- *"What happened?"*

- *"They disagreed," intervened Bev.*

Lucas, Jane, and Daniel were above a map flattened on the truck hood that they managed to hide a bit further in an abandoned building. Bev was a bit further, taking pictures and notes for her report. She was so uncomfortable here, they were in the middle of nowhere, in view of possible rebels.

- "If we take this road, we're dead!" exclaimed Jane.

- "This is the only road we have!" replied Daniel.

- "No! We have this one! It's a bit longer but, at least, they won't wait for us in there!"

- "It'll take us two days more by this road! My road is shorter and safer!"

- "Safer!? You're kidding!? There is nothing to protect us, no towns around, just sand and dunes with millions rebels hidden in there!"

- "Why would there be rebels waiting here for hours!? There won't be anybody! Maybe a child but nothing to worry!" stated Daniel.

- "Lucas, what do you think!?" asked Jane.

- "I...I don't know...We're all tired and people are waiting for the food supplies, I don't think we can lose more time," answered the black boy.

- "Fine! Let's take an opened road with millions way to die! Bev! We're leaving!"

The four went inside the truck, Daniel behind the wheel with Lucas as a co-pilot, and Bev and Jane behind them.

- "So you chose Daniel's road? It didn't create tension between them?" asked the psychologist.

- "Less than I thought, they were quiet..." answered Bev.

Daniel was still driving with Lucas indicating the roads to take. Beverly was behind Daniel, cleaning Jane's face. She noticed her looking a bit too much at her breasts, so she put the wetted towel on her eyes to divert her attention.

- "Are you okay?" asked softly Bev.

- "Yeah... You?"

Beverly nodded with a weak smile. She wasn't okay, but she didn't want to tell Jane, she had other things to do than spending her time reassuring her. Just being next to her was already relaxing, she was feeling good with her friend.

- "You should wear your bulletproof vest," told Jane.

- "I don't like wearing it," pouted Bev.

- "I don't care, I don't wanna you to die."

- "Okay, my Lord!"

Jane playfully rolled her eyes while Bev lightly chuckled before putting her vest. She didn't like wearing it, it reminded her how hostile the place was. She placed her head on Jane's shoulder and her hand on her knee. Since Jane fell while skiing with Max two years ago, it was hurting her sometime, and she knew massages were helping the pain to reduce. The brunette wrapped her arm around Bev, knowing she was feeling safer like that.

While Bev was telling them this part of the story, Max wondered if something happened between the two girls. They were alone in a dangerous place, maybe they became closer than they already were. Too much closer. But she couldn't be mad, she did the same thing to Jane. Maybe it was why Jane didn't react, already feeling guilty for doing the same thing.

- "We arrived at the road..." continued Bev with tears in her eyes.

But she didn't say more. Max turned to watch Jane. The brunette had her hands more than tensed on her pillow, and she was clenching hard her jaw while staring into space. Lucas was holding his head and pressing his temples.

- "I think we need another break. It's lunchtime, have some food and we'll meet later in the afternoon after your other activities," told the psychologist.

Jane was the first one to leave the room, throwing her pillow of anger. The others left the room little by little after her. Max went to her room, where Jane was. The other girl was locked in the bathroom, and Max didn't like when she was doing this, she always wondered what could happen in there. She lightly knocked.

- "Jane? Is everything okay there?"
- "I'm fine!" replied the other girl.
- "Don't stay alone in there, please."
- "JUST GIVE ME A FUCKING MINUTE!"
- "Okay..." sighed Max.

The redhead sat on the bed and just waited. Jane opened the door after ten minute. She seemed calm but very uncomfortable and stressed.

- "You're ready to lunch?"
- "I'm not hungry..." answered Jane with a small voice.
- "I know...It could clear your head and—"
- "It won't clear anything."
- "Okay...Look, I, I don't know what happened between you and Bev, and if you both felt lonely I unders—"
- "What!? Nothing happened between Bev and I! Who do you think I am!? I'm not like you! What the fuck!? I spent eight months in Somalia with only you in my mind, and all you find to say is that I cheated on you with your best fucking friend!? How can you think that both of us would do that to you!? Fuck me! I'm sorry if I'm too much a burden for you that you had to fuck the first girl you met, but I tried to help people by risking my life, but nobody gives a fuck about it! I'm just the crazy girl who can't walk alone in the streets because she gets lost! That's what I am for you!? I'm just your good deed so you can fuck this goddamn girl while I'm shitting myself because of the storm!? Yeah! I knew what you were doing that night

because I'm a fucking cop, no! I'm a fucking great cop, I'm a fucking awesome cop, and your dirty face was covered of her fucking lipstick! Maybe I'm crazy, but I'm fucking not stupid! You don't understand a shit of what I say or do, and I don't give a fuck! It has logic for me! I let Abigail live with us because I just wanted peace with one bad thing that happened to me, okay!? That's all I'm asking! JUST A BIT OF FUCKING PEACE! But I can't have it and I can't count on you for it apparently! NOW GET OUT OF HERE! I'M NOT FUCKING HUNGRY AND I DON'T WANNA SEE YOU NOW!"

Max was astonished by Jane's words. She had never felt so bad in her entire life! It hurt her more than she thought, and everything she said was right, all that Jane needed was a loyal and faithful girlfriend, and it was exactly what she wasn't. She left the room but didn't go further. She stayed against the door, letting her tears drop. Why did she have to do that!? It was so unfair and completely wrong! It was the end...there was no way for Jane to forgive her and she was totally understanding it. She saw their psychologist walking to her so she quickly wiped her tears.

- "Hey, is everything okay?" asked softly the woman.

- "No, of course not..."

- "I'm just here to tell you that we won't continue the confrontation today, they seem disturbed enough."

- "I don't think Jane would come back anyway."

- "Yeah, same for Beverly and Lucas. Maybe you should all take some rest for the rest of the day and begin the activities tomorrow."

- "Okay...thank you."

The woman smiled to her and placed a friendly hand on her arm before walking away. Max spent the afternoon in the copse in the garden with benches, fountains, and a small wooden bridge above a calm river. Many people were here, other patients, other families, or other people staff, she didn't know. Even if the landscape was beautiful, she was feeling ugly inside her. She betrayed Jane and she never thought she would, and now, she would never forgive herself

for this.

20. Ball

Max didn't sleep a lot, feeling really uncomfortable. Jane spent the night on the floor, sat against a wall, staring into space and sweating a lot. Max wondered if she wasn't preparing a plan to kill her. It was their second day, and today they had some activities to become closer to each other and revive the passion.

They went in a wide and empty room with many couples in there. Gabrielle, Lucas, Moussa, and Bev were all together. Well, Moussa and Gabrielle were together, and Bev and Lucas were on a side. Max joined them while Jane went on the opposite side of the room, near the windows.

- "How was your night?" asked Gabrielle.

- "I don't know, I don't remember falling asleep," sighed Max. "What about you?"

- "Lucas had a nightmare, you didn't hear him?"

- "No, I was too busy watching Jane. Thanks for telling her about Lisa! She hates me now!"

- "Shit, sorry, it came out like that, I didn't want to create more tensions! She is really mad!?"

- "More than mad, she feels betrayed."

- "Damn...I'm so sorry..."

- "It's...it's not your fault, it's mine, I shouldn't, I shouldn't have done that..." told the redhead.

- "Yeah but, it wasn't supposed to be me to tell her this...I don't know why I was so mad yesterday, they were driving me crazy by not talking, it's stupid, I know they won't talk just like that, and they already did so much yesterday!" stated the black-haired girl.

- "We all have bad days, and I think yesterday was a bad one for all of us."

- "Yeah..."

- "Is it, is it over with Jane?" asked shyly Moussa.

Max just pouted and shrugged. She didn't really know, she hoped it wasn't.

- "And you Moussa? How was your night?" continued the redhead.

- "She strangely sleeps well. She woke up in a start and sweating like usual, but, she didn't panic, and she ate this morning," explained the man.

- "Well, at least this therapy works for one of them!"

- "I'm sure it will work for all of them, they just need more time."

The three had a loud and tired sigh with their mouth. Four persons with a big smile entered the room and got everyone's attention. They explained them that they would do this activity by couple, sat on the floor with one ball that they would throw to each other only after a compliment or a nice thing said to the other. The one with the ball was the one supposed to be complimented and would choose when throwing the ball. That was what Max understood. She watched everyone getting by pair, while Jane was still looking outside.

- "God, I feel like in High School when we had to do a work with someone and everyone had a friend except me!" stated Max.

- "Don't be stupid," chuckled Gabrielle, giving a small tap on the redhead's belly. "Go get your girl."

- "Yeah, I don't know if we can still call her like that!"

Max sighed of annoyance with her mouth before going to her...well...girlfriend and getting her attention by touching her arm. Jane started and looked at Max with those "what do you want!?" eyes that she hated.

- "Did you listen to what they just said?" asked Max.

- "I don't wanna do that."

- "So do I! But we have to so, sit on the floor and make an effort!"

- "Why would I!?"

- "I'm not asking your opinion, you sit, you do the activity, and you get better, this is not about us, it's about you! You can be mad, I understand, but I still love you, I still want you to feel better, I still have hope for those two weeks! So now, grab a ball, sit, and let's compliment each other!"

Max sat on the floor and waited for Jane. The brunette killed her with her eyes but still took a ball and sat in front of her. They stayed a moment in silence, Jane holding the ball and watching Max with angry eyes.

- "Can you stop doing that!?" told Max with an irritated tone.

- "I'm waiting for my compliments, if you still find any."

- "Well, you're sexy! Is it good enough for you!?"

- "No. Another one."

- "You're unbearable! You're such a kid!"

- "It shouldn't be hard! You can think of what you would tell to this other girl and say it to me!"

- "She is sexy too, if you wanna play this! She is funny, she is smart, and we had conversations together!"

- "Not just that, apparently."

- "Indeed!"

The two remained quiet. Max was so mad at Jane now, she kept provoking her on purpose just to be a victim! It was definitely not her, Jane wouldn't do something like that. Or maybe she would, they had never been in this situation before. Jane threw the ball to Max, surprising the girl.

- "I don't wanna hear you say anything, that's the best thing you could

do!" told Max. "You know what!? I'm fucking tired of you! Because I'm always mad at you for being such a dick, and I can't hate you because you don't do it on purpose! You're goddamn hurt and it's painful to watch! What I did was on purpose and you know why!? Because I stopped existing for you! You're fucking hurt and I can't do anything for you! You reject me every time I try with the hope that one day you'll stop rejecting me, (tears in her eyes) but you still do it! I cheated on you because you're dead inside, you're so dead inside that you didn't even notice how hurt I am, how bad I feel...I just wanted some attention, I wanted you to look at me, to talk to me, but you didn't...so yeah, I kissed her because she was caring about me, wondering how I was, looking at me, seeing me, and not through you! I was someone for someone else...She didn't care to know if you had nightmares, if you ate, if you moved from your bed, she just asked me if I was still skateboarding, what was my favorite movie! She didn't give a shit about you and it relieved me! But guess what!? She asked me to choose between you and her, and I still chose you! So hate me if you want, I'll still be on your back to know if you're okay!"

Max threw the ball to Jane, stood, and left the room. She was too mad to look at Jane or to find a stupid compliment to a girl who didn't care!

Jane was now alone in this room full of people. She was holding tight the ball, like if it was the most precious thing ever. She had a horrible headache and she didn't know why! But what Max told her made her feel a bit worse than she already was, shittier.

Further were Lucas and Gabrielle. They didn't say anything either, Gabrielle was holding the ball but Lucas seemed lost in his thoughts, still shaken by the session of the day before. He was fearing the next one, knowing they would know the truth, know what happened...He didn't know if he was ready for this...

- "Lucas? Are you okay?" asked softly Gabrielle.

- "Yeah..."

- "We don't have to do this if you think it's stupid or if you're not in the mood. We can talk about something else."

- "Jane is right, this is my fault..."
- "No, don't say that, you can't know what would have happened..."
- "You don't even know what I'm talking about!" got irritated Lucas.
- "You feel guilty because you didn't listen to Jane when she proposed her road. You didn't listen to her because you panicked while she didn't, you have so much pride that admitting that she kept more her calm than you one time is making you angry, you didn't listen to her because you wanted her to be wrong, but now, you think that she wasn't wrong because something happened on this road, something which destroyed you. Am I right?"

Lucas was dazed. How could she know all of this!?

- "But," continued Gabrielle, "maybe something would have happened on the other road, something worse, and Jane would have been wrong and not you, you can't know that. You feel guilty because Jane is your friend, but at this moment, your pride was more important than your mission or even just your friend. She insisted but you didn't listen to her. You can't blame yourself for what happened, the persons who hurt you, all of you, are the persons to blame, not you."

- "I, I'm not sure..."

- "We'll figure it out. But I'm sure you're not the one to blame, neither Jane nor Bev. You just all need to understand this."

Gabrielle saw something she didn't see since a moment: a beginning of a smile on his face. She felt stupid because she blushed, like if it was the beginning of their relation. Maybe it was a new beginning.

Moussa and Beverly were not far. They spent the first minutes to roll the ball to each other without saying anything. He tried to keep smiling, he knew how much she loved smile on people's face, she always said that it should be everyone's reason to keep living, to see people smiling, especially people you loved. But the person he loved wasn't smiling anymore.

- "Nothing happened between us," finally said Bev.

- "You and me?" frowned Moussa.

- "No, Jane and me. I love Jane, but not like that. She spent her time helping people and taking care of me, she didn't want me to be scared, that's why I was following her and Lucas, they reassured me. We became closer, but I never thought doing those kind of things with her. I just wanted to thank her in my way, by making her feel a bit better in this Hell. When I think of it, I'm not sure she was watching my boobs, certainly your necklace, because she was missing her Choc'late Moussa."

Moussa had a sad and nostalgic small chuckle. He was missing his nicknames. The first time Jane called him like that she was embarrassed to laugh because she was scared he would think she was racist, but he actually found it really cute, and by calling him with a nickname just reassured him with his relation with her, it was a true friendship.

21. Old friends

The restaurant was having less and less customers. Abigail wasn't complaining, she was so tired that a little break wasn't a bad thing, but then? When Max came back she would lose her job? She didn't want this, this girl was suffering enough at home, she didn't need another problem like this. But a part of her was thinking that there were less customers because Max wasn't there to cook for them. The chef was so mad at all of them, none of the cooks were able to prepare something eatable, he didn't know how they graduated! And, to be honest, Abigail wondered too.

She kept going to work, knowing this restaurant was slowly sinking. At least it was giving her some experiences to help her to find another job and maybe to find a new apartment. She couldn't stay with Jane and Max forever, they needed to find each other again, and being the third wheel was certainly not helping them. She would talk about it with them.

She arrived at the restaurant, as usual. She went through the kitchen, where all the boys watched her ass and whistled at her like a damn dog, to join the locker room. She was feeling sick in this locker room, it reminded her High School and...No, she needed to stop thinking of it. While she was changing, she noticed a locker with a bit paint on it. When she approached, she looked through the small holes on it. It was empty, but the word painted on it was readable. "Dyke". It was Max's locker. "Dyke", it was typically the kind of words she was using to make Jane feel shitty, and it worked. It sadly worked.

- "You're missing your dyke friend?" mocked another waitress.

- "I don't know...I don't think I deserve their help," answered Abigail with a sad tone.

- "You're not scared to turn like them?"

- "They're not sick, they're just in love."

- "This is not love, I mean, it's kinda creepy to know that she could enjoy watching us changing right in front of us."

- "She is not. You painted insults on her locker and you really think she enjoys being here? The only reason she stays here it's only because she needs a job. She hates being here. And I thought Lisa was your friend?"

- "She was. It was different," told Victoria.

- "Why?" frowned the blonde girl.

- "She is not really into girls, she just thought it would be funny to have fun with her, but it doesn't excuse how Max treated her."

- "She chose her girlfriend, why is it so surprising!?"

- "Because it's not love, it's kink."

- "I used to think like that. I was wrong, I was completely wrong. There is no difference between Jane and Max and you and your boyfriend. It's just love! Why is it so hard to understand!?"

- "Why do you always defend them!? I mean, you don't seem to be friend with them!"

- "I know I'm not, I just think they have more value than all of you reunited. And her private life is nobody's business. I don't care if you don't like her, but not for this. Nobody deserves that."

- "You're a dyke too!?"

- "No, I'm not, but even if I was, it shouldn't be a problem! I'm here to serve, not to bang everyone! I don't care what you think of me, I heard worse."

There were too many young Abigail in this restaurant, she didn't know how Max could stay here without being crazy. She had always been a tough girl, she still was. But it didn't mean she had to live like that, with people like that.

She worked all day long. It was empty so she managed to take a break in the middle of the afternoon, in the same place where Max was taking hers. The other waitresses were there too with some of the cooks. They stayed in group while Abigail sat on the ledge of a

condemned window, reading a magazine she found in the girls' apartment. It was a magazine about music, hard rock music, she was sure it was Jane's. She had good tastes. She stayed a moment discovering Jane's world, until she saw her co-workers going back inside. She sighed and stood, but Adam stopped her in her way.

- "What do you want!?" frowned Abigail.

- "I'm sure you know," smirked the boy.

- "I'm not interested."

She tried to walk inside, but Adam stopped her with his hand and blocked her against the wall with his body.

- "It's gonna be fast," murmured the man in her ear.

- "Get off me!" told the blonde girl, struggling and trying to push him away.

- "Sssh, don't worry, it's not gonna be long."

He placed his hand on her mouth and began to lick her neck while crushing her body with his. Abigail felt her heart racing and tears coming in her eyes. She couldn't scream or fight! She was stuck between him and the wall, in a street where no one would see them. She had never felt so weak before. She was frightened, looking around with her eyes, while his hand was sliding in her pants, grabbing her pussy and rubbing it. It was hurting so much...

- "HEY! LEAVE HER ALONE!"

A man ran to them, grabbed Adam, and threw him on the ground before punching him. Abigail fell on the floor, shaking and crying, trying to calm her breathing. The boy stopped punching Adam, stood, and went to the girl.

- "Are you okay?"

- "Yeah...thank you," sniffed the blonde girl.

When she looked at him, she couldn't believe who it was.

- "Troy!?"

- "Um, yeah, do we know each other?" frowned the boy.

- "You hated me in High School."

- "Abigail!?"

- "I'm glad I'm the first name that come up to your mind when I said that!" lightly joked Abigail.

- "Sorry," pouted Troy.

He offered her his hands and helped her to stand. Abigail was so glad to see someone she knew that she jumped at his neck and hugged him.

- "You like dicks, I'm so happy for you," whispered the blonde girl in his ear with some tears falling.

- "Um, yeah, thank you, I guess," frowned Troy.

- "Why are you here?"

- "I wanted to talk to Max, I know she works here. I was wondering how was Jane."

- "They're in therapy. For two weeks."

Troy broke the hug.

- "How do you know?"

- "Well, it'll be hard to believe but, I live with them."

- "You're joking," chuckled the boy, not believing it.

- "I'm not. I got arrested for...prostitution and, well, Jane took care of my case! She drove to my apartment but, apparently, she didn't like that place and gave me a room in her apartment, and Max found me a job here. Can you believe that?"

- "Jane can't hate people forever," weakly smiled Troy.

- "Except herself..."

- "Yeah...You should call the police, for this guy, I can be a witness if you need."

- "I, I don't know...I don't have good relations with the police...it will be useless, they won't do anything."

- "What!? It's their fucking job!"

- "Well, when I got arrested they decided to use me to mock Jane, I don't think they would care to know that a prostitute had almost been raped...they'll take his side."

- "That's...that's unfair..."

- "Yeah, life is unfair."

Troy pouted. They stayed a moment in silence, not really knowing what to do or say.

- "I have to go back to work," said Abigail.

- "Wait, you work with that guy!?"

- "Yeah, he is a cook."

- "There is no way you come back inside to work, you come back inside, you take your stuff, and you leave!"

- "I, I can't do that, I need to work, to show them I'm not a piece of shit!"

- "Show who!?"

- "Everyone! My family, Max, Jane, you! And me! I need to think I'm worth it, to think I can be important!"

- "You're important! Jane wouldn't give you a chance if she didn't think you deserve one! If she knew about what happened now, she would have kicked the shit out of him!"

- "Well, I don't wanna be pessimistic, but she didn't seem able to do

anything anymore..."

- "Yeah...PTSD sucks..."

Abigail pinched her lips together and nodded.

- "Come inside, let me take care of your hand," said softly the blonde girl.

Troy followed her inside. They saw Adam being cleaned by the others. They stopped when they saw Abigail and Troy, and looked at them like if they were the ones in the wrong. The blonde girl ignored them and went directly in the locker room while Troy was killing them with his eyes. They arrived in the locker room and Abigail began to clean his wound on his hand.

- "You don't say anything," stated Abigail.

- "No. I prefer not. They are..."

- "A bunch of us in High School, right?"

- "Yeah..."

- "They painted Max's locker, like when I tagged Jane's locker...I feel awful for this..."

- "Hey, you changed, I can see that. And Jane and Max saw that too. If you were the same bitch as in High School, believe me, Max would have kicked you out of her apartment!"

- "Definitely," chuckled the blonde girl. "I'm trying to redeem myself, but I don't know if I can...I've so many things to redeem..."

- "You admitted that you fucked up, it's already a lot. And now, they're in therapy, they probably have biggest problems in their minds."

- "Yeah...I hope it'll be better for them..."

- "Me too. Come on, let's get out of here."

Troy warmly smiled to her. Abigail took all her stuff in her bag and followed him. She stopped at the chef's office and gave him the outfit she was wearing before definitely leaving the place. She proposed Troy to drink something at the girls' apartment, which he accepted with pleasure.

Abigail showed him quickly the place. When they arrived at the two girls' rooms, Troy felt a pinch in his heart. Knowing that they were sleeping in two rooms was making him feel sick. He slowly opened Jane's door. It was a mess and smelling. There was a pile of dirty clothes, old food, and papers everywhere. He felt sad to know that Jane was living there and like that.

- "She will be better," tried to reassure Abigail.

- "Yeah. She will be."

Abigail rubbed his back and weakly smiled to him. The two went in the kitchen to drink coffees and eat some cakes.

- "Are you happy?" asked the blonde girl.

- "Um, yeah, I think I am...I'll be happier when Jane is okay. What about you?"

- "Well, thanks to Jane I'm feeling better but, I don't know, I still think I don't deserve their helps."

- "No you don't, but they're giving you help, don't refuse it, they've big hearts. How did you finish a prostitute?"

- "Long story, but to be short, I had some problems with my parents at the end of my High School, I went to college but, what I did in High School followed me, and I lost everything..."

- "I'm sorry..."

- "Don't be. It's my fault. But I'm trying to be a better person, I know I can."

- "I'm sure you can," smiled Troy. "If, if you need a job, I've a pastry in New-York."

- "Really!? That's awesome!"

- "Yeah, it is. You could help me in there, to sell. Juan is alone and begins to be really tired, a bit help wouldn't be too much."

- "Juan? Is he your boyfriend?"

- "Indeed. If working with fags is not a problem for you, you're welcomed!"

- "I'm living with two dykes, I think I can work with two fags," joked Abigail.

The blonde girl couldn't believe it. She just lost a job, almost got raped, and her savior, who was Troy, just offered her a new job. After everything she had done, it was the people she hurt the most who were all trying to help her! It was unbelievable and beautiful at the same time. It gave her hope for her future.

22. Another morning

- "Jane!? Where are you going!?"

Max was back in her apartment. It was dark outside and inside, she couldn't find the light. And Jane kept taking her stuff, wearing these army clothes.

- "Jane! Answer me!" insisted the redhead.

- "I have to do it," answered Jane.

- "No you don't! Stay with me! It's dangerous out there!"

- "It'll be okay, I'm karate kid, remember?"

- "I don't want you to be hurt..."

Max began to cry and ran to her girlfriend, trying to keep her with her. She wrapped her arms around her body and tightened as much as she could.

- "I'll be okay," reassured Jane.

- "You won't, you don't have to, I don't want you to leave...I love you, please, stay with me..."

Jane didn't answer. Her body began to become cold, and Max could feel a hot liquid flowing on her. Max slowly stepped back and realized it was blood. Jane was bleeding from her entire body, and her face was pale and cold, with no life on it.

- "Jane? JANE!"

- "I'm gonna be okay..."

Max brutally started and straightened, opening her eyes. Her breathing was fast and heavy, and she was sweating more than usual. She looked around her and noticed Jane on the ground, looking at the window.

- "Fucking nightmare..." whispered the redhead, rubbing her face.

It was the first time she had had such a brutal nightmare. She didn't know how Jane could do it almost every night! It was certainly why she was always so tired and avoiding the nights, it was awful to have nightmares.

She took a moment to calm her racing heart before going to the bathroom to clean a bit her face. The sun was getting up. Trying to sleep would be useless, and they had another confrontation session today. She was fearing it and, at the same time, she was looking forward to it, wanting to know what happened to heal their opened wounds. And they seemed determined to feel better too, well, Bev and Lucas seemed determined to feel better too, but Jane, she was sure that this story of cheating totally desperate her and gave her a reason to give up.

- "Get ready, we're going to have breakfast!" told the redhead.

- "I'm not hungry!"

- "And I don't give a fuck! You get ready or I force you to follow me, ready or not!"

- "You're fucking annoying, I hope you know that!"

- "I get used to the person I'm talking to."

- "Fuck you," grumbled Jane, still on the floor.

Max sighed with her mouth. Jane was more than mad at her, and she hated it. She was still in love with her, but she doubted it was reciprocal anymore. But after this nightmare, she wanted to hug her so much, to be sure she was still alive, still there with her.

- "Did you sleep?" asked Max, in the bathroom with Jane next to her.

- "Why you fucking care!?" mumbled Jane.

- "Because...I still care about you."

- "(sighs with her nose of annoyance) No, I didn't."

- "I'm sorry to hear that...You were stressing?"
- "Yeah. I don't wanna do that, I wanna leave."
- "I know, but you won't, because you're smart and you know it can't keep going like that," stated Max.
- "Why do you care!? You'll leave me anyway!"
- "Is that what you want?"
- "What!?"
- "You want me to leave you? You want to break up?"

Jane didn't answer. She even stopped moving. She didn't know. She was feeling anything. Her expression changed, she was angry but now, she was just lost.

- "I...I don't know..." answered Jane.
- "Okay, don't blame me for kissing another girl whereas you don't even know if you still love me. I can stay with you to help you to get better, but it doesn't mean we have to stay as a couple. But we don't have to talk about it now, just focus on your session, you need to get this out of your chest, to free yourself from this mission."
- "I know...it's just, it's hard...and it hurts..."
- "I know. That's why I'm here. Come on, let's have breakfast."

Max made a movement with head to invite Jane to follow her. They arrived at the cafeteria where Max took some food on her tray while Jane was still behind with her hands in her pockets. The redhead knew Jane wouldn't take anything, it was why she took for both of them. They sat at a table, facing each other, and Max placed what she took for Jane in front of her.

- "You took me coffee!" stated Jane with a surprised tone.
- "Yeah, I'm sure you'll drink something at least."

Jane grabbed her cup of coffee and put it close to her face. The meal was quiet. Jane kept looking around, watching out for a potential danger while Max could just look at her, unable to reassure her.

The three couples were now in front of the confrontation room. Lucas was tapping on his wheelchair with his fingers, making a constant noise, Bev was eating her nails and shaking, and Jane was pacing with worried eyes, shaking and sweating.

- "You think they'll talk?" murmured Max.

- "I don't know, they're really stressed, like if they knew it would happen," answered Gabrielle.

- "Let's hope," told Moussa.

The psychologist opened the room, enabling them to enter. Well, Moussa, Max, and Gabrielle began to enter but none of the others followed. Bev and Lucas were both looking at Jane who went farther, in a corner, looking at the room with wet eyes.

- "Go inside, I'm gonna talk to her," said Max.

They nodded and went inside. Max slowly approached Jane, noticing she was fidgeting a lot. She took support on the wall next to her and just looked at her, waiting for her to talk.

- "I, I can't do this..." told Jane.

- "Why not?"

- "I'm not ready..."

- "How much are you involved in the next part of the story?"

- "Too much...I don't wanna talk about it..."

- "You don't have to, but, they'll certainly do it for you, and I think it's important for you to be here, they need you," said softly Max.

- "No, no, they don't...they never did..."

- "What about you? You don't think you need them?"
- "I, I don't know...I don't know what I need..."
- "What if I tell you that I know what you need?"
- "You can't know that..."
- "You need help, Jane. We're here for this, you don't need to participate, but, maybe hearing what happened to you will help you to realize that you need that help. And for us, knowing what happened to you will help us to help you feeling better faster, you don't think?"
- "Maybe..."
- "Come on, let us take care of you for once."
- "I, I don't wanna do this..."
- "I know."

Max was going to put her hand on Jane's arm, but the brunette stepped back. The redhead pinched her lips together and raised her hands to apologize. She made a movement with head and began to walk away, knowing that Jane was following.

23. What happened

Max and Jane sat on the couch, a bit farther of each other than usual, and waited for the session to begin.

- "When was the last time you slept, Jane?" asked the psychologist.

- "(sighs) I dunno."

She didn't ask more, but she had an idea. She resumed their last session, stressing all of them more than they were.

- "What happened, on that opened road?" asked the psychologist.

No one answered. Lucas looked at Jane to know if she would finally explain something, but she kept moving her head like if she wanted them to ignore her. Bev looked at Lucas before looking away. They were so tired about this, and telling this story was making things worse, they were feeling that pain again.

- "Come on guys, you already made the worst part," tried to encourage Gabrielle.

- "No, we didn't," sniffed Bev.

- "What was on this road? Were there rebels waiting for you?" continued the psychologist.

- "I fucked up..."

The truck stopped between trees, facing the dirt road in front of them, burnt by the sun. There was a small dark shape on it, standing.

- "What are you waiting for!? Just keep driving!" told Lucas.

- "It's a child, she certainly needs help," said Bev.

- "We should go back, it's a fucking trap!" intervened Jane.

- "We can't go back! We saw old mines on there, we could explode and die!" stated the black boy.

- *"Then drive, and fast!"*
- *"What about the child!? We can't let her here!"*
- *"She is part of the fucking trap! I won't die for a fucking child!"*
- *"Children don't hurt!"*
- *"I've been hurt my entire life by children, you really wanna debate about this right now!?"*
- *"Just because you had a shitty life doesn't mean every child is bad!"*
- *"Crush her!" insisted Jane.*
- *"No!" intervened Bev.*

The redhead opened the door and got out of the truck, going in direction of the young girl.

- *"Shit! She is gonna get all of us killed!" stated Jane.*

She took her guns and got out of the truck too.

- *"Bev! Come back!"*
- *"Hey little girl! It's fine, we're here to help, we can help you!"*
- *"Shit! Lucas! You move your ass when you want!"*
- *"She is not in danger if she doesn't go farther the trees!" replied Lucas.*
- *"You wanna take the risk!? Fine! If you wanna watch your friend die that's your problem, but there is no way for me to just wait!"*

Jane jumped on the back of the truck and grabbed a bigger gear before running to Beverly. Lucas began to feel guilty and decided to follow them. Beverly was on the road, calling the little girl who wasn't moving.

- *"She is part of the trap!" yelled Jane, running to her.*
- *"She is scared!"*

- *"This is not our problem!"*

Bev crouched and opened her arms, hoping it would reassure the little girl. Jane arrived and put the gear on the redhead.

- *"Jane! You're scaring her!"* told Bev.

- *"I don't care! We're gonna die if we stay longer here!"*

- *"Then just go!"*

- *"Not without you!"*

- *"Girls!"* called Lucas. *"It's not the moment for a tea! We have to keep going and—"*

"BANG!"

Jane jumped on Bev and laid down on her while Lucas was on the floor, holding his left leg bleeding.

- *"FUCK! JANE! ON YOUR RIGHT!"* screamed the black boy.

The brunette looked up and saw a row of rebels shooting at them. She took her sub-machine gun and began to shoot at them. Lucas grabbed his and did the same thing on the other side. Bev was under Jane who was crushing her body to protect her. She should have listened to her, why did she have to do this!? They knew better than her what could have happened, and it was happening! She was going to die, she was sure of it. They were too many, Lucas was hurt, and she didn't know if Jane was hurt or not. The shoots calmed down on Jane's side.

- *"I'M OUT!"* yelled the girl.

A pain on her shoulder projected her behind Bev.

- *"Shit!"*

She looked under her shirt. A bullet missed the vest and finished in her shoulder. She rolled again on Bev when she felt something on her neck.

- *"No move,"* ordered the man pointing the gun on her. *"Turn. Slow."*

- "Fuck," sighed Jane.

She had a cold shiver and felt her heart racing. She took support on her hands and slowly straightened on her knees with her hands up. It was so calm, with just flying dirt. They were too many. A group was threatening Lucas the same way as her, and same for the truck.

Bev slowly turned her head and saw the young girl in one of the rebels' arms. She felt stupid. They should have listened to Jane, since the beginning, none of this would have happened! She watched Jane, but the second after, the man hit her face with his gun, knocking her out.

Lucas reopened his eyes with difficulties. His head and leg were hurting so much, and it was dark around him. His hands were tied up in his back, and he had a bag on his head. He was on someone's shoulder, and he was feeling sick because of the moisture smell. It was so humid, he was sure they were underground. He heard a door grating and then felt the ground under his ass. It was cold. They took off his bag from his head, but Lucas couldn't see much better. There were only torches lightening the dark room in stone. One of the rebels bent to him and threatened him with his knife. He didn't need to talk, he knew what it meant. He tied them to chains on the walls, to be sure they wouldn't try to run away. Lucas turned his head and noticed he wasn't alone. Bev was on his left, terrified, with Jane next to her, still knocked out. But there were other people here, people from Somalia. Certainly against the rebels, and now, they were paying the price of their state of mind. The rebels left the room. Lucas looked at his leg and had the surprise to see they took care of his wound.

- "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry..." sobbed Bev.

- "It's not your fault, it's mine..." said Lucas.

- "No, no, you did right, I should have listened to her..."

- "How is she?"

- "Breathing..."

Beverly moved her arm to shake Jane the best she could. Jane slowly opened her eyes and straightened.

- "Are you okay?" asked Bev.

- "Um...yeah, I guess," answered Jane with a frown showing her pain. "Just fucking headache and stomachache."
- "They cleaned your wound and put a bandage, it's a good thing, right?"
- "They don't want us to die."
- "So it's a good thing?"

Jane clenched her jaw and sighed with her nose. She didn't answer. She knew they didn't want them to die because they were going to use them, in every way they could.

- "Fuck it," said Jane between her teeth with a low voice. "We need to get out of here!"
- "Go on! I'm watching!" replied Lucas.
- "You're not helping, as usual!"
- "What am I supposed to do!? I'm tied up! Same as you!"
- "Guys, fighting won't help," sniffed Bev.
- "Yeah, you, you should shut up! No one fucking listened to me! We wouldn't be here if we used MY road!" stated the brunette.
- "You think you're helping right now!? You want us to feel guilty so you can die with no regrets!?" replied the black boy.
- "I want you to face the goddamn truth! You know you're part of the shit! We're here because of you! Both of you!"
- "I know, I know..." cried more the redhead.
- "And stop bawling! This is fucking annoying!"

Bev tried to stop crying. All she could do was sobbing in silence. They didn't know how many time they stayed in there. Seconds seemed hours, and hours seemed years. But they would have preferred not seeing those rebels again. A group of five reappeared, and they weren't here to say sweet things to them. Two of them grabbed Lucas while another one

detached him. They didn't bring him far, they threw him on the floor before blocking his members.

- "What are you doing!? Leave him alone you fucking assholes!" yelled Jane, struggling with her chains. "GET OFF OF HIM!"

None of them cared about her yells. The taller one stood above him with his knife held tight in his hand.

- "Where is camp?" asked the tall guy.

- "Fuck off!" answered Lucas.

The guy made a movement with his head, and, the second after, Lucas was screaming of pain, feeling his finger breaking on the pressure.

- "The camp!"

- "No fucking way! AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARGH!"

They kept torturing him, breaking his fingers one by one, before stopping, understanding he wouldn't talk. So they punched him and kicked him in his stomach again and again just for fun, before tying him again. They thought it was over, but no, it was just the beginning. The tall guy slowly walked in front of all the prisoners, his hands behind his back, wanting to intimidate them. He stopped in front of the two girls and crouched, took a puff of his cigarette, and blew the smoke on them with a laugh, revealing his dirty yellow teeth. Bev's breathing was irregular because of her tears while Jane tried to not fade, looking deeply at him with a serious face. But the man didn't care, he knew he had advantages in this situation. He turned his head to Bev with a big smile, licked her cheek before murmuring to her ear, his hand caressing her thigh:

- "You're the next one."

- "Don't fucking touch her, asshole!" intervened Jane.

But the man didn't want to hear her. He slapped her with all his strength, dizzying the girl. Bev felt her heart in her throat and thought she was going to puke. She looked at Jane with more tears falling.

- "Do something Jane, please...I don't want them to..." begged the redhead

with a shaking voice.

Two of them detached her and brought her a bit farther in the dark. Jane came back to herself and tried to pull the chains off the walls by pushing with her legs. Lucas watched her struggling, he thought she was going to snatch her own arms.

- "Jane! Please! Do something! DO SOMETHING!" panicked Bev.

The session room remained silent. Bev stopped talking, crying too much, close to the panic attack. Lucas was looking down, feeling ashamed for giving up. Moussa, Max, and Gabrielle were pale, feeling dazed by this situation with nothing good at the end. Max understood that Jane watched again someone she loved being raped. The psychologist waited for Bev to calm down before asking:

- "Did they rape you?"

They all turned their heads to her. Bev closed her eyes, making fall her tears, before slowly shaking her head to say no.

- "She yelled..." told Bev with a higher voice than usual.

Max turned her head to her girlfriend who was hiding and silently crying behind the pillow.

Jane stopped struggling, knowing it was useless. She saw Bev's desperate eyes and felt powerless, as when she was with Loren years ago. She looked at Lucas, but the boy didn't seem here, he wouldn't be helpful. Anger grew, giving her more energy to keep fighting. She struggled again with her chains, catching the rebels' attention. Some of them began to laugh at her with their fingers pointed to her, while the others kept touching Beverly who was still calling Jane. The brunette's body tensed, and the girl saw only one solution.

- "RAPE ME! RAPE ME! RAPE ME! RAPE ME! RAPE ME! RAPE ME!"

The rebels stopped laughing. The chief of the group stopped touching Bev. He grabbed the redhead and brought her back to her first place, putting the chains around her wrists before freeing Jane.

- "If it's what you want," told coldly the guy.

All the heads turned to Jane this time. The brunette was looking away, not wanting to see their pity for her. She wasn't crying anymore, certainly empty, but more because she was angry and uncomfortable now.

- "I, I still hear you scream..." told Lucas with tears in his eyes. "And then..."

- "Then you stopped..." sobbed Beverly. "Why did you stop? I, I thought you were dead..."

- "Well, I thought I was dead too!" replied sharply Jane. "I wished I was..."

Max felt her heart stopping when she heard that. She didn't know how she would have done without Jane coming back. But all of this...she didn't have words to explain what she was feeling right now, she couldn't imagine how they were feeling about all of this, keeping it for themselves.

Jane began to feel oppressed and preferred leaving the room, not supporting all those eyes on her. Max wanted to follow her, but her legs were feeling weak, she wasn't sure she was able to stand.

- "You should maybe check her," proposed Gabrielle.

- "I, I will....Just give me a minute," answered Max, feeling sick.

- "How did you get out of here?" continued the psychologist, like if she didn't care about what she just heard.

- "When, when they finished, they let her on the floor...She wasn't moving anymore..." explained Bev with more tears.

- "But she became crazy," told Lucas.

Her entire body was hurting. She wasn't realizing what just happened, it couldn't be real. She was empty, the only thing she could feel was the liquid flowing from her head. It was slimy; it wasn't blood. She was cold and dizzy. She could hear some people talking but it seemed far. She couldn't move, she didn't want to move. For what? She was dead.

A hand grabbed her shoulder and forced her to stand. Jane felt weak, but she saw her friends looking at her with something like relief and pity. She was mad at Lucas for doing nothing, so she decided to do something. She felt anger growing and lost control.

She turned her head to the man holding her. He blew his cigarette smoke on her face. Jane headbutt his torso, making him fall on the floor. She grabbed his machete and cut the head of the guy behind her. It rolled to the prisoners, his body squirting of blood. She kept fighting like that, killing them one by one, spreading their guts on the ground. Once all dead, she took the guns, freed the prisoners, and covered her face with the dead people's blood. Jane walked out of the room with a machine-gun in her hands, not caring if it was dangerous or not. The others tried to follow her the best they could, but she was going too fast and not checking if everyone was there. She just kept shooting everyone.

- "Jane! Slow down! You're gonna get us killed!" told Lucas, limping.

If they listened to her before, they wouldn't be in this situation right now, and she was the one who was going to kill everyone!? What a bunch of assholes.

Max found some forces and left the room, too worried to stay there. She hoped Jane wasn't running away or doing something worse.

The others continued like if they didn't see her leave.

They arrived outside. It was dark, they spent hours inside, or maybe days. Jane kept shooting everyone, it was a real mess. Lucas told her to calm down, but the girl couldn't, she lost faith in humanity one more time, so why calming down? It wouldn't help them! She kept walking, not really knowing where she was going. They arrived in a path and saw trucks at the end of it. It was their chance. They began to walk to them, but a rebel didn't want them to leave, so he shot the trucks with his rocket launcher. The prisoners jumped on the side of the road, hiding from the projectiles.

- "Shit! We must go! More are coming!" told Lucas.

Jane took her machine-gun and began to shoot them, but they were shooting too.

- "Come on, Jane! It's too dangerous!" insisted the black boy.

He put his hand on her arm to force her to follow, but the girl brutally freed herself and pushed him without looking away from the rebels. Lucas gave up and told the others to go. He took a gun on the floor and walked ahead of the group. He managed to lead them to the forest where they could hide. He looked back and saw Jane fighting without stopping. He hesitated but went to her to help her. He stayed a bit behind and shot them the best he could. When there was a breach, Jane finally joined him. Lucas began to walk back but...

"BOOM!"

His body was projected at few meters of the ground before falling again. He got dazed and his ears were buzzing. He didn't know what happened. He saw Jane running to him and looking at his leg. The pain began to grow as Jane was touching his knee.

- "STOP! STOP! WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?" yelled the boy.

He felt a pressure around his thigh before being carried on the girl's shoulder. He began to panic. Why did he need to be carried on!?

- "Jane! JANE! What happened!?"

- "You're gonna be okay," said Bev.

- "What happened!? What the fuck happened!?"

- "You walked on a mine..."

- "What!? No, no, no! I didn't! Jane! Let me down! It's your fucking fault! Fuck you! FUCK YOU!"

Gabrielle finally knew what happened to his leg. Just a few centimeters and he was fine. She could understand his anger, if he hadn't waited for Jane, he would be fine. Why Jane didn't follow them!? She wanted to be a hero or what!? She didn't know, and she tried to not be mad at her, it was hard enough for them.

Max arrived at her room, hoping to see her girlfriend inside. When she entered, she saw Jane pacing and mumbling:

- "I can't believe it, I can't believe it! Why did they have to talk!? They weren't supposed to talk! Nobody was supposed to talk! (Jane quickly approaches her) You weren't supposed to know that! I didn't want you to know that!"

Jane stopped in front of Max and looked in her eyes with a heavy breathing. Max felt weird, it had been a long time since Jane looked at her this way.

- "You know you could have told me, you know that?" said softly the redhead.

- "That's not the problem!" got angry Jane.

- "Then what's the problem?"

- "I...I...You didn't hear what they said!? It's not clear enough for you!? What do you think!? It was insane! Nothing will be like before anymore! I'm not feeling anything inside anymore! I'm empty, okay!? I'm fucking empty! They were five on me and inside me! THEY WENT INSIDE ME BECAUSE I FUCKING BEGGED THEM TO!"

Max found nothing to answer. The despair in Jane's eyes totally destabilized her. Jane's anger seemed to decrease, replacing her bulging eyes with wet eyes.

- "It's...it's not fucking normal, no one wants to be raped! No one...NO ONE! NO FUCKING ONE! This, this is not normal, something is wrong with me...I'm...I'm not okay...I can't feel, I can't feel anymore...I just, I just feel them on me while I'm...I'm not moving...I can't feel you anymore, when you touch me it's not you...it's them..." explained Jane with some tears falling.

The brunette collapsed on the floor before hiding her face in her knees and crying. Max was unable to move. She stayed a moment on her feet, trying to control her breathe to hold her tears. She thought that crying wouldn't help Jane. But it was too hard to watch, so she silently sobbed, to not bother her.

- "If you could stop smoking, I would appreciate it..." sniffed Jane.

- "I already did."

- "Really? When?"

- "When I heard what happened."

- "Okay...I'm so sorry, I know I've been awful, but, I can't do otherwise, I'm so dead inside, and I wanted to tell you but I didn't, I didn't want you to think I was just a stupid victim born to see people get raped or be raped..."

- "No, Jane, you don't have to apologize, this is not your fault," answered Max, feeling her throat tightening. "I should have been more patient, and called before..."

The redhead wiped her tears before going to the bed to take a pillow, sitting next to Jane on the floor, and giving her the pillow. Jane took it and hugged it, before crying more. Max didn't know what she was feeling. Guilt, obviously, for cheating on her and waiting too much for help, but the rest, she didn't know. She was disgusted by them, but a part of her thought it was brave from Jane to sacrifice herself to save her friend from this terrible act. Maybe it would finally be better.

24. Progress?

Jane, Beverly, and Lucas spent the night in another room. The professionals wanted to study how they slept and all, Max didn't really understand, but she hoped it would help them to have a better sleep. At least, she was able to sleep late. When she woke up, she had the reflex to see how Jane was, but she wasn't there. It was certainly better like that, after all these emotions the day before, staying with professionals used to this kind of situation would help Jane more than staying with Max who didn't know what to do.

After a long moment doing nothing in her bed, Max decided to go to the cafeteria for a breakfast. She wasn't really hungry, but she hoped she would see Moussa and Gabrielle, to know how they were. But no one was here, but she had the surprise to see Jane at a table with some nurses with her. The women saw her and invited her to come, letting the two girls alone.

- "Hey," said softly Max.

- "Hey," answered Jane with a small voice.

- "How was your night?"

- "I had cables all over my head, I felt like a damn lab rat."

- "You didn't sleep?"

- "They gave me something to sleep, but I had like...four nightmares and I tried to punch one of the doctors."

- "Tough night," stated the redhead.

- "Yeah..."

Max felt stupid. She didn't know why she thought she would feel better in one night! Just hearing someone talking about your problems didn't solve them. Jane was still looking around when not being lost in her thoughts, and her hands seemed to shake more than before. Jane was vulnerable now, and her body was showing it.

- "Did you eat?"

Jane nodded.

- "What did you eat?"

- "Uh...a bar, cereal bar, I guess and...orange juice, I think," frowned Jane, unsure.

Max nodded. A nurse came to them and asked Jane to come for a session, letting Max alone. She looked at her tray and realized she wasn't hungry at all. She began to understand how bad the situation was, like if she needed to see Jane this morning to see it wouldn't be easy. She felt sick and sad. But she was joined by Moussa and Gabrielle.

- "Oh, hi," said the redhead. "How do you do to be always together?"

- "Our rooms are close by," explained Moussa. "We knocked at your door, but you weren't there, so we thought you were here, and there we are."

- "Okay..."

- "Are you okay?"

- "Yeah, yeah, it's just...I just saw Jane and...I don't know how she could feel better..."

- "That's why we're here, we just need to let them do their jobs."

- "But, after? When we're back, what are we supposed to do?"

- "I don't know, but I don't think they'll let us leave without giving us some advice, right Gab?"

- "Yeah, yeah," sighed the black-haired girl.

- "You're okay? You look angry!"

- "Well, I can't stop thinking of the reason why Sinclair lost his leg."

- "Oh, what happened?" asked Max.

- "Well, to be clear, your girlfriend decided to do what the hell she wanted, and he tried to save her," explained sharply Gabrielle.

- "Wait, you're blaming Jane now!?"

- "She has her part of responsibilities."

- "You're kidding me!? You didn't hear the part where she got raped!? Maybe she lost her mind, but I thought you could understand that! It's like if I'm blaming Bev for asking for help! It doesn't make sense! And if you wanna play this with me, don't forget that Jane wanted to use the other road, but your boyfriend preferred choosing his ego than his common sense!"

- "You're fucking kidding me!? If Jane didn't act like a hero, Sinclair would still have his leg!"

The two girls angrily stood, ready to fight. Moussa had to separate them to be sure nothing bad would happen. Damn, he never saw them like that! Not against each other! Maybe Jane, Lucas, and Beverly were not the only ones who needed help. He took them in an empty room and threw them on the couch.

- "We CAN'T do that, okay!?" began Moussa. "What happened is done, we're not here to know who is responsible, but to help them to accept what happened, okay!? This is hard enough, don't make it worse! We weren't there, we weren't in their situation, they were terrified by all of this! Jane was raped, Lucas lost his leg, and Beverly witnessed all of this, thinking it was her fault and feeling powerless! They made mistakes, all of them! It had awful consequences but blaming one of them for everything that happened is not right, we can't do this to them, am I clear!?"

The two girls clenched their jaws and looked down before nodding.

- "Good. We spent one week on that, now they have only a few days to have a beginning of something good, and they need us for this. All of us. Don't forget why we're here."

- "I know..." said Gabrielle. "It's just, if Jane stopped shooting at them before-"

- "She couldn't know there was a mine on their way, she didn't push him on it! You can't blame her for something that she couldn't know! And maybe if Jane didn't shoot them, they would be all dead, we can't know that! We can't know..."

- "I guess this is why we have private sessions too," sighed the black-haired girl.

- "Yeah, I know for a psychologist it's hard to admit but-"

- "I'm not a psychologist, I'm barely an intern."

- "You still work in an office. But that's not the point, we need to be fine to help them to be fine, that's what I mean, I've lots of hope for them, what happened yesterday shook them, I know it!"

- "Yeah, maybe..."

- "We need to hope, it will be hard, but it'll work."

Max sighed with her nose. She didn't know if she had hope or not, Jane was so down this morning that she began to worry that she wouldn't get out of all this darkness.

Jane, Lucas, and Beverly were sitting on a couch, facing the psychologist who was writing on her files about them. Beverly was in the middle, trying to use the less space as possible, Jane on her right, her arms crossed and looking away, and Lucas on her left, agitated.

- "So, I had many private sessions with all of you, and, today, I would like you to share how you felt during your missions, all your missions, to each other," told the psychologist.

Jane rolled her eyes while Lucas sighed with his mouth. Bev looked shyly at her two friends before watching the woman in front of her.

- "I, I can begin, if it's fine," said Bev.

- "Sure, go on," encouraged the psychologist.

- "Well, I, I don't know how to begin...when I saw this little girl, I thought of this little boy, Karim, who was fighting to defend his

home. He was...ten, maybe less...Anyway, it was when you were all in missions, I stayed at the camp, but we got attacked so...I finished alone in the city, in the dead bodies and...fragments...it was all destroyed and I didn't know what to do...but then, I met Karim, one of the last survivors, he helped me, he couldn't understand what I was saying and I couldn't understand what he was saying but we still managed to communicate, he...he even explained me how to use a gun..."

The redhead stopped talking. She was lost in her thoughts, staring into space before leaning again against the couch.

- "Did you know about this?" asked the psychologist.

- "No, she never told us," answered Jane.

- "No, of course not, you all had other things to think, I didn't want to bother you with this..."

- "We thought you were dead!"

- "Yeah!? I thought you were dead too when you stopped screaming! And it didn't stop you for not talking for two weeks! Two fucking weeks!"

- "And what did you want me to say!? You really think your looks on me weren't enough!? Did I have to share you my feelings!? Fuck you! I still think it's all because of you! And I still wish it was you! I can't do anything now!"

- "Just telling us would help us to understand!"

Beverly placed her hand around Jane's wrist, but the brunette brutally rejected her before defensively standing and stepping a bit back.

- "There is no word to describe how I feel! 'Till it happens to you, you don't know how it feels! You all think that just talking about it will change a thing but it's not how it works! I don't wanna do that with you, I don't wanna do shit here, no one asked me if I was ready for everyone to know that! You had no rights to do that! It's my story, not yours! Just because you read books or saw documentaries about

victims like me doesn't mean you know everything about this! It's different for everyone, maybe this kind of therapy worked for majority of them, but I don't wanna do that!"

- "But, this is because of you if we're all here," told Lucas like if it was obvious. "I lost my leg because of you!"

- "I never asked you to wait for me!" stated angrily Jane with tears in her eyes.

- "Don't act like a fucking hero then!"

- "I wasn't trying to be a hero! I wanted them to kill me because I knew I wouldn't be able to live again! I JUST WANTED TO DIE!"

Jane left the room without looking back. She couldn't stay more time in that room; it was oppressing, embarrassing, and unbreathable. Who the fuck they thought they were to think they knew better than her what she was supposed to do or feel!? She was done with those pseudo psychologists thinking they were better than anyone, she was done with all those group sessions, and she was done with this fucking place! She burst into her room, furious than ever.

- "WHY DID YOU FORCE ME TO DO THIS FUCKING SHIT!?"

- "You slapped me, did you forget?" answered calmly Max, laying on the bed and reading a magazine.

- "I..."

Jane found nothing to answer. Remembering the slap totally made her feel bad and ashamed, well, a bit more.

- "Come here," said softly the redhead, tapping on the bed. "Just take some rest, you had hard days."

- "Don't tell me what to do!" got angry Jane. "It's just...everybody tells me what to do..."

- "Okay, do what you want. If you need anything, I'm here."

- "I know..."

Jane stayed a moment standing, hesitating. She didn't want to go to bed to not make think Max that she was listening to her, but she had nothing else to do.

Max was looking at her. If Jane wasn't sick, she would have found it cute, but now it was just painful and sad.

The brunette finally laid down next to Max, hugging a pillow and watching the ceiling.

- "It's been a while we didn't stay in the same bed," stated Jane.

- "Indeed."

- "I...I'm not mad at you..."

- "About?" frowned Max.

- "About, you know...seeing...another girl," told Jane between her teeth, tensing her hands on the pillow.

- "Yeah? You don't seem okay with that."

- "I'm not! I understand why you did it, but I can't stop hating me for this!"

- "Hating you?"

- "Yes! I knew you were feeling bad, but I didn't care! You said it yourself, I was so bad that I didn't notice you were bad, but I did, I just couldn't do it in another way! I wanted everyone to feel bad because I didn't understand why I should be the one feeling like that..."

- "Jane, don't blame yourself for this, it's not your fault. PTSD is hard to handle, if it can be handled. You wanna feel better?"

- "Dunno...I'm not sure it's possible...I made no progress..."

- "You did! Two weeks ago, you would have never talked to me like that! Maybe for you it's nothing, but you can't expect to heal in one week. It will be long, it will be hard, but it will work. I know you

don't believe in yourself, but I do believe in you. You're the strongest person I know."

Jane didn't answer. She just shyly nodded before frowning. She was lost. She never thought one second that it was actually working! She was still feeling dead inside, like if she could feel only anger and depression.

Some minutes later, someone knocked at the door. Max told them to enter, not really wanting to move, and because Jane was asleep, she didn't want to wake her up by moving too much on the bed. Their psychologist slowly entered. Max really hoped this therapy was going to work because this woman was very clingy!

- "I'm sorry, I just wanted to know how she was," said the woman with her voice down.

Max just shrugged with a pout.

- "Tomorrow we'll begin new sessions to help them with their self-confidence and self-love. They won't be all three together because it would be too complicated, but if you could be here with Jane, I'm sure it could help both of you."

- "Uh, yeah, okay, no problem," answered Max.

- "Great, thank you. I'll see her later in the day."

The woman smiled warmly to the redhead before slowly closing the door. Max didn't know what was going to happen in these sessions, but it sounded to be a good thing, she was excited by this! She took a moment to look at Jane. The other girl seemed to be so peaceful; Max hoped a nightmare wouldn't ruin it. She hesitated, but placed her hand on her girlfriend's head, and caressed her hair, like she used to do. She missed those moments in bed with her, just cuddling each other and taking care of the other. She hoped they would do it again.

25. Self-love

The two girls were sitting next to each other on this brown leather couch. It was early in the morning, just after the breakfast, and both girls were tired. Max was impressed, Jane didn't scream that night, but she didn't know if it was because she didn't have nightmares or if it was because it was a small one. At least, she slept. The psychologist entered and sat in front of them.

- "Good morning," smiled the woman. "How are you?"

- "Tired," answered sharply Jane.

- "Right, well, let's begin! To be short, I want you to get your body used to have soft physical contacts again. Nothing big, we'll do it step by step, and Max is here to help you."

- "What am I supposed to do?" asked the redhead.

- "Well, touch her."

Max frowned to Jane who didn't seem to like this idea.

- "It's bullshit!" told the brunette.

- "You don't have to do it right now, it's just to know which parts of your body you allow her to touch," explained the woman.

- "None! Nobody fucking touch me!"

- "She told me she couldn't feel me anymore, you don't think it's risky to force her to be touched while she is still traumatized!?" intervened Max.

- "It could help her to heal faster."

- "I'm not that sure. But you're the professional so...Jane? You remember at the beginning of our relation? One day I came to your apartment because I was stressing to touch you?"

- "Uh...yeah, why do you tell me this?" frowned Jane.

- "Well, the situation is kinda similar, but, this time, it's you who feels insecure."

- "That's exactly why I don't want to be touched!"

- "I know! It's just...we could do it slowly, like, I can try to touch your hand or your ear, and, if it's not okay, I stop, I just stop, that's all. What do you think?"

- "I...I'm not sure..."

- "Okay...Well, I put my hand on my thigh, and when you're ready, you put yours on mine, okay?"

Jane gulped with difficulties before nodding. She stayed a long moment watching the hand with a heavy breath and beads of sweat on her forehead and temples. She tried multiple times but every time she took back her shaking hand.

- "I can't..." whispered Jane with an upset tone.

- "It's fine, take your time," encouraged Max.

Jane took many deep breaths before finding some courage and placing her hand on Max's.

- "How do you feel?" asked the redhead.

- "I don't know...Not good...You don't feel disgusted?" answered Jane.

- "Disgusted? Why would I be?"

- "For nothing..."

Jane quickly took back her hand, rubbing it like if it was hurting, before looking away. Max looked at her with sad eyes. Seeing Jane not able to touch her hand without almost passing out was heartbreaking.

- "I'm sorry..." apologized Jane.

- "Don't be, it's totally normal," said the psychologist. "What did you

feel when you touched her?"

- "Sick."

- "By her?"

Jane shook her head to say no, holding her tears.

- "Did you feel her?"

- "I think...but not everywhere..." sniffed Jane.

- "What did you feel?"

- "Them..."

Max felt her heart getting upside down. She hated bringing her such gross feelings, that was not what she wanted.

When Jane calmed down, the psychologist insisted for them to try again. Max placed her hands on the other girl's hands, cheeks, and ears, but every time she got dazed with the sensation of bricks in her stomach. The psychologist asked Jane to stay in front of a mirror and to watch herself, to watch her own body in his real way and not the way she was seeing it. Max wasn't there for this session, but when Jane reappeared in the room, she seemed more embarrassed than before. She stayed a moment standing, her arms around her chest like to hide it, and looking around with a worried expression on her face.

- "Jane? You're sure you're okay?" asked Max with a concerned tone.

- "Yeah, yeah..." answered the brunette with a shaking voice.

- "What did you do during this session?"

- "I...I saw..."

- "What did you see?"

- "Me...this is disgusting..." told Jane with tears falling.

- "No, Jane, you're not, don't think that," said the redhead with a sad voice.

Max slowly went to her, hesitated, but gently put her hands on her girlfriend's cheeks.

- "Look at me, Jane."

The brunette began to breath heavily but looked up at Max.

- "What happened is disgusting, there is no other word to describe it, but you, you're not, okay?"

- "You can't know that..."

- "Of course I know that, I've been living with you for years!"

- "No, no, you can't know that, you can't know..." continued Jane now looking down and sobbing.

- "Yes Jane, I know that, you're gonna be okay, I'm not letting you down, do you hear me? I'm not letting you down, okay?"

- "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry..."

- "I know, it's okay, it's okay."

Max rubbed Jane's cheeks with her thumbs before placing a quick but soft kiss on her temple and putting her forehead against her girlfriend's. The redhead struggled to not cry too. She dreamt of physical contacts for months, but she didn't want it like that. Not because of that.

26. Curse

The end of the second week was exhausting, especially for Beverly, Jane, and Lucas. They had more and more sessions, alone or with their lovers. But now they were all in direction of their homes. After five hours on the road, Max and Jane finally arrived. The apartment was empty. Max wasn't really surprised, it was still early, Abigail was certainly at work. The redhead had a long sigh with her mouth, exhausted and relieved to be finally home.

- "You should take a shower and take some rest," said Max.

- "Okay..." answered sheepishly Jane.

The brunette had slow and heavy steps to the corridor, before closing the door behind her. Max collapsed on her couch, her coat, shoes, and bags still on her. She was empty; those weeks totally wore her out! She fell asleep without knowing it.

Abigail arrived a bit later, followed by Troy. When she opened the door, she wasn't expecting to see Max this early.

- "They're back!" stated happily Abigail with her voice down.

- "She seems exhausted," told Troy.

- "She is. Stay here, I'm gonna check Jane."

The blonde girl let her friend in the living-room before going to the corridor, until the other girl's room. The door was ajar; she could see Jane laying down on her bed, facing it, wearing a black hood. Abigail slowly entered and heard some light snores. She didn't know why but Abigail was happy to see them; she was feeling safe with them, they saved her life. And, when Jane was sleeping, she seemed peaceful; so peaceful that she could forget she was sick. She went back in the living-room with a soft smile, before sitting next to Max. The movement woke the girl up.

- "Shit, Abigail! You scared me! I thought I was still driving!" told the redhead.

- "Well, you should be happy I woke you up if you were driving!" joked Abigail.

Max playfully rolled her eyes.

- "Oh, hey Troy! What's up?"

- "Nothing more than last time. Don't be mad, but I stole your waitress!" answered the man.

- "Really?" frowned Max. "What happened?"

- "Nothing, really," said Abigail with a shaking voice.

The redhead frowned more. She looked at Troy who gulped with difficulties before turning to Abigail who seemed embarrassed.

- "God, Abigail! What happened to you!? What did they do to you!?"

- "Nothing, I'm fine, don't worry..."

- "No, no you're not! Something happened, I can see it on your face! Jane had and still has the same expression as you, and something happened to her every time! Don't keep it for yourself, we can help you!"

- "Why would you want to help me!?" stated Abigail with tears in her eyes and bitterness in her voice. "I'm just a piece of garbage, I treated your friends and girlfriend like shit, I helped Alban to hurt her because everyone preferred her than me, I even told your step-father about you and her to get rid of her! I don't deserve your help, I still don't understand why Jane took me here!"

- "I...Well, because Jane is the kind of person to help people in need, and she forgave you for what you did."

- "But why!?"

- "Because hurt people hurt people."

- "What?"

- "That's what she said, after you talked about your dead sister, Jane understood that something was not okay for you, that, maybe, you were missing your sister so much that all you could feel was anger and pain, and she thought too that your sister was the only person paying attention to you, and losing her made you lose attention, so you tried to find it again, in your own way. That's why she forgave you, because she knows how it is to lose the person who loves you the most," explained Max.

Abigail felt more tears coming in her eyes and began to cry in her hands. Max rubbed her back and mouthed to Troy:

- "What happened?"

- "Well, when I arrived, there was this guy who was trying to...you know, sexually abused her," told the man.

- "What!? You're kidding!? Who the fuck did that!?"

- "I don't know his name."

- "I hope you told the police!"

- "No, no, it's fine, don't worry, I deserved it..." intervened Abigail.

- "It's not fine! None of this is fine! You need to tell the cops!"

- "You want me to tell Jane?"

- "No! Not Jane! She doesn't need to know about this, none of you talk to her about this! Am I clear!?"

Abigail and Troy frowned at each other before nodding.

- "Wh-What happened to Jane?" asked Troy.

- "I can't tell you, just avoid those kinds of subjects with her, she had had two tiring and complicated weeks, she needs some rests now. Moussa goes back to work tomorrow, I'll ask him to pick you up and take your deposition, okay?"

- "I...I don't know..." said Abigail.

- "Don't wait before it's too late, don't finish like Jane, I don't need two Janes in this apartment! Moussa will help you, I'll help you, I've many names of psychologists or therapists I can give you, they'll help you."

- "Thank you..."

The blonde girl began to cry more so Max wrapped her arm around her to comfort her. What was wrong with people!? Why did they have to do that!? She didn't ask who did that because she was sure she would kill him the second after.

When the blonde girl calmed down, Troy decided to let them alone.

- "You're sure you're gonna survive this? I mean, living with two dykes and working with two fags?" joked Max.

- "Well, you're the only persons helping me so...I'm more than grateful, even if I don't deserve it..."

- "Stop saying that! Everybody deserves a second chance, even you! I don't wanna hear you again say that, is it clear!?"

- "Yeah, okay...thank you," weakly smiled Abigail. "Is...is Jane going to be okay?"

- "I...I hope she will...She made lots of progress, now I just need to be sure she will keep going like this."

- "We need to be sure she will keep going. I'm still here to help."

- "You're right, thanks."

The two girls smiled to each other. Max gave friendly taps on the other girl's thigh before standing and bringing her bags to her room to unpack them. All this story was crazy, what happened to them was crazy! She still couldn't believe it, and what happened to Abigail made it worse, it was like if there was a curse around Jane, she had lived in the middle of those kinds of acts for years now, and it was like if nothing could stop it.

The professionals gave her some programs to follow. They preferred

them to not try to sleep together before a few weeks, but Max was so tired; physically and emotionally; that she wanted to be next to her. So, she went in her room and laid down with her, looking at her. She wanted to hug her and tell her that everything would be alright. But she couldn't. But, maybe, she could take her hand. Even if it was still sensitive, Jane seemed to feel less bad. She tried, Jane was asleep anyway, she certainly wouldn't feel it. Max slid her hand on her girlfriend's and thought that would be all. But Jane started and looked around before stopping on Max, then their hands.

- "I'm sorry," apologized Max, quickly removing her hand. "I didn't want to...I'm sorry..."

- "No, no, it's fine, it's fine...I, I thought we weren't supposed to—"

- "We're not. I just wanted to see you. I didn't mean to hurt you."

- "You didn't, it's not you..."

The two girls looked away. It was weird now, they couldn't even look at each other without making them uncomfortable. But Max was sure that showing Jane any forms of embarrassment would make it worse for her, so she looked up at her again, trying to show confidence.

- "How did you sleep?" asked the redhead.

- "Actually...not that bad...'still had a nightmare but..."

- "You didn't scream."

- "Yeah," weakly smiled Jane.

- "It's great, see? You made progress, I'm proud of you."

Jane nodded before looking down. Max hesitated but moved her hand to her girlfriend's cheek and lightly caressed it, before taking off the hood, to see more her face. Jane didn't move back, which warmed Max's heart.

- "You should maybe go with this girl, she could take care of you better than I," said Jane.

- "I can take care of myself," told Max.

- "But—"

- "But nothing, I just want you, Jane. No one else."

Max felt her heart jumping when Jane had this small smile. It was still shy, but it was there. The redhead noticed the other girl becoming a bit pale, so she removed her hand. Both girls laid again on the bed, looking at each other, before joining their dreams.

27. Surgery

Max resigned from her job and found another one a bit closer to her apartment, so it was fine. The ambience was a bit better but not that much. At least they weren't mocking her for being lesbian, as they didn't know, but she was still the only girl and she had the amazing surprise to see that Lisa was working here! It was just a matter of time before it became Hell. Anyway, at least she had a job and she could pay Jane's sessions, even if Jane accepted the fact that she needed help and began to pay herself her help.

The redhead was waiting in her car, in front of a building. Jane got out of this building and went in the car. She didn't look at Max, she didn't want her to notice her red puffy eyes. But the redhead wasn't fooled, she knew Jane was crying during her sessions, and she was glad she was, she wasn't keeping all her emotions for herself.

- "Want a caramel?" proposed Max, holding out the candy.

Jane sniffed, looked at her girlfriend's hand before shyly taking the caramel with her shaking hand.

- "Thanks..." said Jane with a small voice.

The girl opened it with difficulties before putting it in her mouth.

- "You're ready?" asked softly the redhead.

- "I'm scared..." sniffed Jane.

- "I know. You're gonna be okay, it's gonna be fast."

- "Yeah..."

Max started the car and drove away. After thirty minutes of ride, they arrived in front of a dermatologist surgery.

- "I can go alone," told Jane.

- "I know, I just need to take care of some papers," answered Max.

- "Okay."

The two girls got out of the car and went inside. Max took care of the papers while Jane was standing behind her; as close as possible; looking around. When the redhead finished, she was going to go back in her car, but Jane stopped her by grabbing her wrist.

- "Can you wait with me?" asked shyly Jane.

- "Of course, let's go," smiled Max.

The redhead slid her hand in her girlfriend's and took her to the waiting room. Jane couldn't stop moving and shaking. She was stressing so much that she thought it was her last moments alive. Even if she was feeling a bit better, she still had some struggles with public places and physical contacts, and today she had both! But it was necessary, she knew it, she wouldn't be hurt again.

- "I'll go alone," said Jane.

- "Sure, no problem," answered Max.

- "Miss Brown?"

Jane felt her heart stopping. It was too quick, she wasn't ready!

Max stood and held out her hand to her.

- "You don't have to go alone you know, it's kinda scary, I would prefer having someone with me too," reassured the redhead.

Jane loudly gulped, nodded, and grabbed Max's hand before following her in the surgery room. It wasn't a surgery room like in hospitals, it was warmer, with only two doctors and one professional bed or armchair, she didn't know, it was a mix of both.

- "Hello Jane," smiled the nurse.

- "H-H-Hi," stuttered the brunette.

- "Take your time."

Jane nodded. She took deep breathes and slowly took off her coat, helped by Max. She began to breath a bit faster, before taking off her tee-shirt, hiding her body with her arms and closing her eyes.

- "You're okay?" asked Max.

- "Yeah, let's finish this," answered Jane.

- "Open your eyes, you can't see yourself here."

Jane gulped and opened one eye, checking the room, before opening the other one and looking up. Max gently grabbed her arm and guided her to the bed. The two women explained to them the surgery, but Jane didn't listen, she preferred not knowing what they were going to do to her wound. Max was standing in front of her, her hands on her cheeks to relax her.

- "You're shaking so much," stated the redhead.

- "I know, I know, I'm trying to think to something else," answered Jane.

- "You're doing great."

Max stepped a bit closer, first to reassure Jane, but especially because she wanted to see the wound. Since she knew about this, she never had the opportunity to watch it. They were extracting the liquid inside, she didn't know if it was pus or not, it looked like chestnut cream.

- "The fact that you're enjoying it is making it worse," told Jane.

- "Sorry, but Jane, you have a portal in your back! You could be in a sci-fi movie!" said with enthusiasm the other girl. "Sorry, you know how I am, I don't want to stress you more than you are."

- "It's okay, don't worry. Just...enjoy, even if it's weird."

- "Yeah, I'm weird."

Jane had a small chuckle, making smile Max. The redhead missed so much this smile, those chuckles, and this tenderness between them.

Even if Jane was still uncomfortable with some physical contacts, at least, Max could finally comfort her by holding her hands or caressing her cheeks. But Max noticed that Jane was getting paler and paler.

- "You're okay?"

- "I'm not sure...Talk to me about something else, how is it at your new work?" answered quickly Jane.

- "Well, (sits in front of her) it's not that bad. The others are not as awful as the ones before, and the chef is amazing, I can't wait to learn more things from him!" told excitedly Max.

- "Yeah? At least they're not as disgusting as the assholes!"

- "No, don't worry, they're not mocking me, they even respect me sometimes!"

- "Sometimes, wow!" lightly mocked Jane.

- "It's better than nothing."

- "I guess. I can't wait for you to have your own restaurant, you deserve it."

- "I'm still young, I've times. I still need to learn things!"

- "You're the best, it's the others who need to learn from you!"

- "That's totally true," joked the redhead with a serious tone.

Jane had a weak smile, but for Max it was everything. She was so proud of her, after all those weeks working on her physical and mental health, it was the proof that it wasn't for nothing, it wasn't a waste of time. She hoped it wouldn't get down again, she didn't know if she could survive it.

- "And it's done," said the nurse, placing the bandage.

- "Already?" frowned Jane.

- "You wanna stay here one more hour?" joked Max.

- "No! Oh, hell no! No, no, no, no, no! Let's go!"

Jane quickly stood and put her tee-shirt and her coat faster than before. Max chuckled, thanked the two women who gave her advice, and followed her girlfriend.

- "See, I told you you could do it," smiled Max.

- "Yeah," sighed Jane, relieved. "It was still horrible!"

- "But you still made it, it's the only thing which matter."

- "Yeah, it will help me to draw a line under it, right?"

- "Of course, I've no doubt on it."

Max took her girlfriend's hand before placing a small kiss on it. The two girls went back to their apartment for new "sessions". The psychologists told her that she should watch herself in the mirror, at least once a day, without having a panic attack, to get used to it again and to love it again. She was in a good day today, so it went pretty well. She struggled to contain her panic attack, but she made it, and she was proud of it. And Max spent the entire day with her, she couldn't be happier.

28. Too much pain

Max and Abigail were sitting at the kitchen table, Jane still sleeping. The blonde girl was stressing a lot, she managed to claim a file against Adam, and Moussa was amazing with her, but now, she had to go to appear before a judge for this affair and to face her assaulter. By luck, Troy was coming with her to give him his version.

- "You let Jane alone today?" asked Abigail.

- "Yeah...I don't like it but, I don't know, she was kinda okay yesterday and my boss told me I would be fired if I was missing another day because of her so, I don't really have the choice," pouted Max.

- "Troy gave me my day, after going to the court, I'll go directly here, to be sure she is okay."

- "Okay, thanks."

At the same moment, Jane appeared in the kitchen. She still didn't know what happened to Abigail, Max thought it wasn't the right moment to tell her, she wasn't ready.

- "How did you sleep?" asked Max.

- "I had better nights," grumbled Jane.

- "I didn't hear you."

- "I didn't scream."

Max nodded. She tried to caress her cheek, but the brunette refused the gesture by moving her head. Max didn't take it badly, it was like that for now, a day good and a day bad, she was still in the rollercoaster.

- "You know you can come to me when you have a nightmare, right?" said Max.

- "I don't need you to babysit me! Just fucking live your life!" got

irritated Jane.

- "Take a breath, remember what your therapist told you."

- "I fuck my therapist, okay!? I don't give a fuck of what they think of me!"

Jane looked at Max with angry eyes, but the redhead didn't fade. She was sure it was because of a nightmare or something like that. The brunette stood and went back to her room, slamming all the doors behind her.

- "She is not in a good day," stated Abigail.

- "Not really...She will calm down and do what she is supposed to do."

- "And what is she supposed to do?"

- "She is supposed to tell me her nightmare, to not get angry, things like that, but it's easier in theory, I know how she is, it won't work in the twinkling of an eye!" explained Max. "She will certainly spend the day in her room so, there is nothing to worry about."

Abigail nodded. The two finished to get ready before leaving the apartment. Jane was now alone in her bed, facing the ceiling. It was so calm, too calm. She could feel the gun on her neck before being hit by it in her face and waking up in this basement. It was months ago, but she could still feel them raping her, see the dark place, hear Beverly screaming of fear, it was still inside her. The pain, the weakness, and the fear were still inside her, forbidding her to have other emotions, to think positively. And this nightmare, this fucking nightmare made things worse. She was alone in this. If the others were staying with her it was just because they had pity for her, not because they loved her. No one was loving her, and she couldn't hate them for this, she was so pathetic and stupid, even herself couldn't love her! She could end this. It wasn't hard. No one would miss her anyway.

She found some energy and got out of her bed. She opened her French door and went on the balcony. There was no one on the horizon; it was the perfect moment. She approached to the guardrail

with a feeling of freedom and relief, like if it was the best and only thing to do. She took a chair and placed it against the barrier. She put her right foot on it and took a deep breath. She knew it was the right thing to do. She was going to put her other foot on it when she felt something against her left leg. She looked down and saw Cat rubbing against her and meowing to her. Jane frowned at him. She felt bad, it was like if her sister was sending her a message from where she was, through their cat. She instantly regretted what she was going to do and put off her foot from the chair before moving it away from the barrier. She took Cat in her arms and sat on the balcony, her back against the barrier.

The judgement at the court finally ended. As every evidence were against him, the boy was directly condemned for six years in jail. Troy was mad because he thought it wasn't enough, but it was better than nothing, and it was enough for the blonde girl. Moussa drove back the girl before going to work. When Abigail entered the apartment, she went directly to Jane's room. She lightly knocked but no one answered, so she slowly opened the door. The bed was empty, but the French door was opened. Abigail felt her heart stopping, it couldn't be good. She slowly went on the balcony and was relieved to see Jane in there with Cat on her lap.

- "Jane!? What are you doing here!?" asked quickly the blonde girl with a worried tone.

- "I'm sorry..." apologized the girl with her red puffy eyes.

- "It's fine, don't worry, I just thought...I was scared that you would jump..."

- "I...I wanted to..."

- "What!?"

The blonde girl quickly walked to her and sat next to her.

- "What happened?"

- "I...I don't know...I was, empty, and tired, and...I didn't want to feel pain anymore..." explained Jane with tears in her eyes. "I don't wanna

be a burden..."

- "You're not a burden, what make you think that?" told softly Abigail.

- "Everything..."

Abigail felt sorry for her. She didn't know what to do or say, Max was better in those kinds of situations.

- "I should call Max."

- "No! Let her work, she doesn't need to know that," intervened Jane.

- "I'll tell her, no matter what," said Abigail.

- "I know, I know...Not now...don't bother her at work...please..."

- "Okay...But we should go back inside, you would be better."

Jane nodded. The two girls stood, Cat walking away, and went back inside, by the French door of the living-room.

- "Let me prepare you some coffee," told Abigail, now in the kitchen.

- "Okay..."

- "Can I ask you something?"

- "Go on..."

- "What made you change your mind?"

- "Um...Cat came to me and...I don't know, I felt something inside," explained Jane.

Abigail had a soft smile.

- "Your cat gave you one of his lives."

Jane looked up at Abigail with a sad expression before looking at her cat behind her. She began to focus on her breath, not wanting to cry again.

- "I'm...I'm going back to my room, I'm tired," said Jane.

- "You don't want some coffee?"

- "No. I need to sleep."

- "Wait!"

Abigail stopped making coffee before taking some magazines and books in her arms.

- "Now I'm ready," smiled the blonde girl.

- "For what?" frowned Jane.

- "To keep an eye on you."

- "What!? You're gonna watch me sleeping!?"

- "Yep."

- "No fucking way!"

- "After what happened, there is no way for me to let you alone, and I'm sure you understand why."

- "...Alright!"

Abigail had an amused sigh before following Jane. The brunette collapsed on her bed, while Abigail tried to find some space on the desk to place her magazines before closing the French door. At least, it wasn't smelling anymore.

- "You're stressing me," mumbled Jane.

- "I'm not doing anything!" replied Abigail, sitting at the desk.

- "Just knowing you're here is stressing me."

- "Just sleep! I'm just gonna read some magazines, nothing else!"

Jane mumbled some inaudible things but didn't fight more. The problem wasn't Abigail's presence, she was fearing a worse nightmare

and to scream because of it. But she didn't, she slept a few hours before waking up in a start and sweating. It could have been worse, and Abigail managed to calm her. Her desire to die disappeared for now, she even found some strength to take a shower and to wear something else than a pair of pajamas. But she didn't leave her room after that, feeling safer in there.

Abigail stayed the entire day with her, until she heard the entrance door closing. She left the room with Cat in her arms and went directly to her.

- "Hey, how was the court?" asked Max, exhausted.

- "Great, he is condemned. I need to talk to you," said quickly the other girl.

- "What is it? You're scaring me!"

- "It's about Jane. She tried to jump from the balcony."

- "WHAT!?"

- "When I arrived, she was still in there, she told me that Cat brought her back to reality, he saved her!"

- "Where is she!?"

- "In her room."

- "You couldn't call me!?"

- "She didn't want me to!"

Max couldn't believe it! Since when she was listening to Jane!? She threw her stuff on the floor before quickly walking in her corridor and bursting inside Jane's room. The girl was sitting on her bed with her legs crossed, fidgeting and looking at Max with sad eyes.

- "Tell me it wasn't planned."

- "It wasn't," answered Jane now looking down.

- "Jane..." sighed Max.

The redhead sat in front of her girlfriend, but Jane kept avoiding eyes contact.

- "What happened? Is it because of your nightmare?" asked softly Max.

Jane quickly shrugged.

- "Come on, talk to me, please."

- "There is nothing to say..." said Jane with a low voice.

- "I think there is a lot of things to say. What about your nightmare? Was it still in the basement?"

Jane sniffed and nodded.

- "You were there too..." continued Jane. "I...I was on the ground, with them on me, laughing, but Bev and Lucas were laughing too, and Moussa, and the others...and you, you were there, looking at me, pointing at me and laughing, while holding another hand...You stopped laughing to kiss her, right in front of me...I hated you so much. And I thought you hated me too."

- "Never, I would never hate you, no matter what..."

- "You can't know that."

- "Well, for now I know I'm not hating you. How many times do I have to tell you that I love you before you believe me!?"

- "I'm sorry..."

- "It's fine, I'm not mad at you, I was just so worried, I don't know what I would do if you actually did..."

- "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry..." apologized Jane.

- "You know what? I'll stay with you tomorrow," told Max.

- "What about your boss?"

- "I don't care, if he can't understand, it's not my problem. I prefer staying with you."

- "I, I won't do it again...I don't want you to have problems because of me..."

- "I won't have problems because of you, if I have problems with him, it's only because of him, okay? And we have many things to do tomorrow!"

Max placed her hand on Jane's cheek to caress it. The brunette didn't look up but had a small smile on her face, warming Max's heart.

- "Don't panic, but there is a wild Abigail watching two dykes in their own habitat," murmured loudly the redhead, looking at the door.

Jane had an amused sigh before turning her head to look at the blonde girl. Abigail winced at them before entering the room.

- "I was wondering how you were," told the girl.

- "Better," answered Jane.

- "You scared the shit out of me, you know that!?"

- "I know...I'm sorry..."

- "It's fine, don't do that again!"

- "I won't...it's not planned..."

- "We'll see the psychologist tomorrow anyway, you'll talk about it with him, okay?" intervened Max.

- "Yeah..."

Max placed a soft kiss on her cheek before standing and leaving the room with Abigail.

- "You're okay?" asked Abigail in a whisper.

- "She almost killed herself and you asked me if I'm okay!? I'm definitely not, if Cat didn't show her some affection, she would have

jumped! We can't let alone again like that! It's too dangerous!"

- "I know, I know, but she seemed to understand it was wrong."

- "Yeah...But there is no way for me to go back to work until I'm sure she is fine enough to be alone."

- "I can pay for what you need, I can work more, I can even find another work if I have to!"

- "It's fine, we have some savings, don't kill yourself at work. She has many sessions this week, she'll be better. I hope."

- "I'm sure she will," affirmed the blonde girl.

Max nodded. All this story totally turned her stomach over. She cooked but she felt sick while doing it. At least, Jane ate something. But Max didn't sleep this night. She stayed in Jane's room to be sure she wouldn't try it again, and she didn't. She seemed to sleep well, in peace, but Max knew she wasn't. She saw a tear fall on her cheek. She hoped it wasn't because of her this time.

29. Massage

Max and Jane spent the day outside, driving in the town from sessions to other sessions. One session with her psychologist this morning, then with her psychotherapist, then a group session, and finally with her psychiatrist. The last one prescribed some antidepressants to Jane, even if the brunette affirmed that she was okay. The two girls were in direction of their apartment, and Jane was quiet, as usual after a day like that.

- "You want an ice cream?" proposed Max.

- "I'm not a child," mumbled Jane.

- "I know."

Max parked her car and took off her seatbelt.

- "Cherry and hazelnut?"

Jane kneaded her right ear before lightly nodding. Max smiled, took her girlfriend's hand, and kissed the back of it, before leaving the car. Jane still had her pride, but Max knew her by heart, she loved too much ice cream to resist to it.

She went back a bit later in the car, giving Jane her ice cream, and holding hers.

- "Strawberry?" told Jane.

- "Always!" smiled Max. "It's not Italian ice creams, but those ones are not bad."

- "Yeah, I kinda miss Italian ice creams. Nocciola and amarena, right?"

- "Sì signora, and fragola for me."

Jane had a small smile on her face, remembering the nice moments they spent in Europe. She was missing it, she hoped they would go back in Europe for vacation.

- "I thought, I don't know...I could try to go running tomorrow morning...What do you think?" said shyly Jane.

- "It's an amazing idea, Jane! It's been a long time you didn't! You want me to come with you?"

- "You don't like running, you don't have to."

- "Jane, if you want me to, I come."

- "...Okay..."

- "Cool," smiled Max.

The redhead was happy to hear that Jane was going to do something she loved doing before, like if she finally wanted to do things. Max knew she wouldn't run a lot, still stressing to go outside, it was why she proposed to come with her, to reassure her and to give her the strength to go through her ideas.

When the two girls arrived at home, Abigail was still not there. The two girls took a shower before going to Max's bed for a session of massage. Max sat on her bed with her legs crossed, a pillow on her lap with Jane's head on it. The redhead covered her hands with massage oil before slowly placing them on her girlfriend's temples and made small circles. Max loved those moments with Jane, it was giving them some intimacy, and it was giving Jane more self-confidence and self-love.

- "Shoulders today?" asked Max.

- "(sighs with her nose) yeah..."

- "I won't hurt you, I promise."

- "I know."

Max focused on her face, especially her ears, Jane was very sensitive in these parts. She loved kneading Jane's ears, they were so soft. She continued the massage to the neck and finished on her shoulders. They were tensed at first, but the massage relaxed her, and Jane let go the tension. After a moment, Max noticed some snores coming

from her girlfriend. She had an amused smile and travelled her hands to her face again, caressing her cheeks, chin, temples, forehead, head, and ears. She wanted her to have a nice nap, in peace, with no nightmares, no stress, no sadness, just softness and love.

Abigail appeared at the door. Max made a movement with her head to invite her to come inside. The blonde girl sat at Jane's feet and looked at the sleeping girl with a small smile.

- "Tell me, how was she when I bullied her?" asked Abigail.

- "You really wanna know that?" frowned Max.

- "I need to know. I need to know how much she suffered because of me."

- "Well, uh...she was shaking all the time, she was fearing going back to school, she was fearing to just go outside, even just opening her locker was painful. After you assaulted her in the forest, she avoided the place and was unable to convince her brain that the nice word you cut on her wasn't there anymore. I had to touch her chest to make her realize there was nothing anymore. You really want me to continue?"

- "No, no, I had enough for now," sniffed the blonde girl.

- "You're not like that anymore, and you coped enough, you can stop punishing yourself like that. We forgave you. You certainly needed help before, but no one gave it to you."

- "Yeah, you're certainly right...I hate me so much for this, and you should hate me so much for this too!"

- "We did! But now, you changed, we can see it! I don't know what to tell you to make you feel better, it's like when I tell Jane that I love her but she still doubts on it, you're fine now, you're a good person, you're fighting for your future, you're doing everything to be forgiven and you are forgiven! Now, you should talk about it with your psychologist, I know you see him for what happened, but digging in your past could be a good thing for you."

- "Yeah...Thank you, you're amazing," weakly smiled Abigail.

- "I know!" joked Max.

The two girls had a small chuckle. Abigail began to play with Jane's toes while Max was massaging her head. Her face darkened when she saw a tear falling along her girlfriend's nose. The brunette began to move in her sleep before having a start, opening her eyes while wiping her tear.

- "What the fuck!? I'm crying!?" got surprised Jane, with small eyes.

- "Um, yeah, it happens sometimes," pouted Max.

- "Oh...It's weird."

Jane straightened and frowned at Abigail who was holding her right foot. The blonde girl quickly removed her hand. Jane made a weird face but didn't react. Max wanted to comfort her girlfriend, so she put her hand on her back.

- "NOT THE BACK!" got angry Jane.

- "(quickly removes her hand) I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I didn't want..." apologized the redhead.

Jane pinched between her eyebrows, her eyes closed. She had an awful headache, and Max's hand on her made her feel the pressure she had when she was under those men.

- "I'm sorry, I didn't wanna scream," apologized Jane.

- "It's fine, I shouldn't have tried to touch you there, I knew it was risky."

Jane took deep breathes before turning to Max and grabbing her hand. Max blushed and smiled. It was rare when Jane was showing some affection. She was feeling bubbles inside, like at the beginning of their relation. Just holding her hand was making her happy.

But the one who was smiling the most was Abigail. She was so happy to see them putting the pieces back together.

30. Restaurant

Three months passed. It was the end of Spring, and Jane was allowed to work again. To celebrate this, Moussa decided to take her to the restaurant with Abigail and Beverly. They didn't choose by accident, they went to the restaurant where Max was working without telling her. Everything was fine, until Abigail recognized their waitress. The two girls looked deeply at each other before breaking it. Lisa looked with insistence at Jane, feeling anger growing inside. She took their orders and left them without saying a word.

- "She doesn't like me," stated Jane.
- "Maybe she is in a bad day," pouted Moussa.
- "But it's her job to smile and be polite!" said Bev.

Abigail didn't take part of the conversation, feeling a bit uncomfortable. She didn't know if she should tell them or not for Lisa. She didn't want to ruin the night, it was a big day for them! Jane was going to work again the next day, and Bev and Jane were able to stay together in the same room without having a panic attack, and in public!

- "You're stressing for tomorrow?" asked Abigail, wanting to change the subject.
- "Uh, yeah, it's been a long time and, I don't know, maybe it's too early," answered Jane.
- "Don't be stupid, you're more than ready, we all know that! And the Lieutenant won't ask you too much for your first day, it'll be cool," reassured Moussa.
- "Yeah, I hope you're right..."
- "I'm always right."

The table lightly chuckled. Lisa came back with their orders and the coldest attitude ever, especially with Jane. She almost spilled the plate on the brunette! But Jane didn't say anything, not really caring.

- "I think there is something written on my forehead like "hate me, I love it", " stated Jane.

- "Or she thinks you're dating Abigail, and she doesn't like lesbians," told Bev.

- "God, if she knew!"

- "Hey! What does that mean?" intervened Abigail with a false upset tone.

- "You're the straightest girl I know."

- "Yeah? You could be surprised!"

- "Wait, you had...with girls?" frowned Moussa.

- "They pay more."

- "Really!?" said Bev.

- "I'm not an easy girl."

Moussa choked in his drink while the two girls began to laugh, not expecting this answer. Abigail didn't care if they were mocking her or not, she was so happy to see them like that, finally enjoying some time together.

- "So? You prefer with boys or girls?" asked Bev.

- "Well, majority of the girls I had were all shy and all, wondering if they were gay or not so...in fact, some were not bad, but I still prefer boys, sorry ladies," explained Abigail.

- "Too bad!"

The ambience was warm around the table. They spent the meal talking to each other with no tension, even if Jane and Beverly still had the reflex to look around sometimes, but not as much as before.

Moussa paid for all of them, as he promised. The four friends waited a moment outside, watching all the other customers leaving the

building. There was only the staff inside, the waitresses were cleaning the dining room while the cooks were certainly cleaning the kitchen. Lisa was one of the last to leave the place. On her way to her car, she hit Jane's shoulder on purpose.

- "What the fuck is your damn problem!?" replied Jane with an upset tone.

- "Oh, I'm sorry, did I hurt you?" answered Lisa with a fake sorry tone.

- "Wh—I wanna know why I'm your scapegoat tonight! I don't even know you!"

- "Of course, she didn't tell you about me, it would have surprised me! But, me, I know who you are! You're a fucking mess, and all of this today, it's not gonna last, you're gonna become crazy again because that's what you are!"

- "...You're the girl Max kissed?"

- "But she can use her fucking brain! Let me tell you something, when you were completely out, she was crying every fucking day because of you, she even preferred going to work with those assholes who were mocking her than staying with you because you were awful with her, you treated her like shit, you don't fucking deserve her, you're just a piece of garbage, no one should lose their time with this! And we both know you're still like that."

Jane clenched her jaw and closed her fists. She wanted to shut her damn mouth, but a part of her was thinking she was right. She tried to maintain the look Lisa was giving her, but she couldn't, she just looked down.

- "That's what I thought. You're fucking weak," told Lisa.

- "Get out of here! Now!" intervened Moussa.

- "I'm leaving. But it's not over. She'll come back to me."

Lisa spat on Jane's shoes before walking away. Abigail was going to show her her fist a bit closer, but Jane stopped her with her arm.

- "You're gonna let her leave like that!?" said Bev.
- "I've nothing to tell her," answered Jane.
- "You're not scared that she could try something with Max!?"
- "She certainly will."
- "And!? You're not gonna do anything!?"
- "I trust Max."

The girl turned to them with a small smile. The three others gave friendly taps behind her head before rubbing her hair.

- "You're unbearable, I hate you all," chuckled Jane, getting out of this mess.

Max appeared right after this. She frowned at them at first, not sure if it was them, but she was so happy to see Beverly and Jane going out and together that her smile grew instantly.

- "Why are you all here!? It's amazing!" told Max.
- "We wanted to congratulate Jane and Bev for all the progress they made," told Moussa.
- "That's amazing! Did you eat here?"
- "Nah, we bought sandwiches and stayed here," mocked Abigail.
- "If I said something stupid, don't hesitate to tell me!"
- "When you need!"

Max playfully pushed her. Jane wrapped her arm around her shoulders, making blush the redhead.

- "How was it?" asked Max.
- "It was really good, except the waitress," said Moussa.
- "Oh no! It was Lisa!?"

- "Yeah, bad luck!"

- "I'm so sorry Jane! I never wanted th—"

- "It's fine, it's fine, don't worry, we had a conversation," answered Jane.

- "..."

- "Don't worry, really, let's not talk about it."

Max wrapped her arm around Jane's waist and tightened as much as possible before kissing her cheek. While they were walking away, Jane turned her head and saw Lisa sit in her car, looking at them with dark eyes. Jane raised her arm and showed her her middle finger with a particular pleasure. Even if Jane thought that Lisa was right on some points, she wouldn't let her a new chance with Max. Never.

31. Back to work

It was the day. Jane was standing in front of her mirror, looking at her wearing her uniform and taking deep breathes. She wasn't sure if she wanted to go back to work, it could be risky, and she wasn't missing her colleagues. She was glad to have Moussa with her, it was her only reason to go. She left her bathroom, feeling a bit uncomfortable, and went to the kitchen.

- "Wow! You look amazing!" smiled Max.

- "You're sure I'm ready?" asked Jane.

- "Me, personally, I think you are. Spend your day normally, you'll see tonight if you're ready or not, okay?"

- "Okay..."

- "Moussa will stay with you, you'll be okay. And if you don't feel good, you can just go back home."

- "Yeah..."

Moussa arrived. Max kissed Jane's cheek and tried to cheer her up a bit, but she knew she was wasting her breath. She watched her girlfriend leaving, like a proud mother watching her child leave for living their own life.

When the two friends arrived at the police station, they took a coffee before going through the stairs to join their office. On their way, they met some of their colleagues.

- "Welcome back Jane, it's good to see you," smiled one of them.

- "I'm happy you're feeling better, 'can't wait to work with you again," told another one.

Jane nodded and frowned to them before looking at Moussa, not really understanding.

- "The Lieutenant had a report of your situation while you were in

therapy, and, you know how it is here, when someone knows something, everyone knows so, they know," explained the black man.

- "Well, that's amazing," said Jane with irony.

- "You're not mad?"

Jane shrugged. If it could allow her to not be worried by their jokes, she wouldn't complain. But she didn't like them knowing about this, it was still fragile for her, and she didn't want them to feel free to make remarks about this or to think she would want to talk about it.

When they arrived at their office, all their colleagues stood and began to applaud her.

- "It's a bit too much, you don't think?" murmured Jane to Moussa.

- "They're happy to see you," smiled Moussa, amused by the situation.

- "They're feeling guilty for mocking me all this time!"

- "Maybe, but, at least, they're warm."

- "Yeah, whatever."

Jane rolled her eyes and was in direction of her desk when their boss appeared in the room with a big smile.

- "I think I talk in the name of everyone by saying that we're relieved and happy to give you back your badge and gun," told the man.

Jane frowned but took it anyway. It was so embarrassing! She just wanted to sit at her desk and read some files, that was all! Why did they have to do all of this!? When the applause finished, she was finally able to sit.

She spent the morning filling files, again and again. It was a bit boring, but, at least, she was working. For lunch, Moussa and Jane went to the staff room, where a microwave was available. Max prepared a blanquette of veal with rice the day before; a French plate that the two girls really loved, especially the redhead; so, Jane took some in a lunch box for today. She always preferred Max's recipe, she

wasn't putting alcohol in the sauce because she knew that Jane wasn't liking the taste of it. The two friends sat at a table, facing each other.

- "I've a dessert for you," told Moussa, chewing his sandwich.

The man put a small brown pot.

- "Oh! A choc'late mousse! Coming from the one and only Choc'late Moussa!" smiled widely Jane.

Moussa had the biggest smile he never had. He missed so much this stupid nickname and thought he would never hear it again. He held back his happy tears and kept eating with his best friend, happy to see her like that.

When they came back to their desks, they didn't have the time to sit that their boss told them to follow him for an investigation. Someone found a finger and called the Police; the first arrivals found the body some meters farther away.

Moussa and Jane were both excited. They were always the last ones to be called in such investigation, it was an awesome opportunity for them. They arrived in a wood used by many runners and cyclists and reached the yellow strip before seeing the cadaver. The man had no legs anymore and was wearing a gray sportswear. The Lieutenant asked them to look for evidence around. The two friends separated. Jane was a bit farther, looking around from where she was. She noticed a dead squirrel, shredded. She didn't put too much attention on it before seeing a bird in the same shape. And another squirrel.

- "STOP!" screamed the girl.

- "What the fuck officer Brown!" grumbled the Lieutenant.

- "Stop fucking moving! We're on a field of mines!"

Everyone stopped moving and realized she was right. The Lieutenant looked closely at the ground and saw one not really far from them.

The mine-clearing team arrived thirty minutes after. They installed a security perimeter, evacuating as much people as possible. Jane, Moussa, the Lieutenant, and the medical examiner were the last ones

on the crime scene. Three men were slowly approaching them with their detectors, putting a small red flag every time they were sure there wasn't a mine.

- "You're okay, Jane?" asked Moussa.

- "Why I wouldn't be?"

- "I don't know, mines, it sucks!"

- "Yeah, it sucks. But what sucks the most in the sun on our fucking heads!" stated Jane.

- "Yeah, I agree! You can't walk faster!?"

- "We're doing our best, sir, don't panic," answered one of the men.

- "I'm not panicking! My ass hurts as fuck!"

- "Well, let's hope it's your only problem of the day!" joked the man.

- "I hope too! Or I'll be your problem of the day!"

- "Let them do their work, Officer Lewis," intervened their Lieutenant.

- "I am."

Moussa was trying to relax Jane by making stupid remarks, but it was annoying his boss which made smile his friend.

Almost an hour later, the Lieutenant, the doctor, and Moussa were finally able to move away. Moussa stayed in the zone, even if the men of the mine-clearing team asked him to go away.

- "I'm not letting my friend alone!" replied the black man.

- "I'm fine Moussa, don't worry," answered the brunette. "Why don't you order a pizza for my return?"

- "You're on a field of mines and all you think about is a pizza!?"

- "...I'm hungry!"

- "We just ate!"

- "It was apparently not enough! Go, go drink some water and enjoy some fresh air, don't worry for me, I'm not alone."

- "Fine. But I'll come back!"

- "I know!"

Moussa sighed with his mouth before walking away. Jane waited to be sure he was far enough from them before saying:

- "Don't come closer. I don't know what kind of mine it is or what could happen, but I've my foot on one of them."

32. Mine

It had been an hour since Jane told them about the mine. The mine-clearing team was in discussion with the Lieutenant and Moussa, who was mad at Jane for not telling him, to find a solution. The five men were back to her to explain her.

- "We'll create a security perimeter around you, then, when it will be safe enough, we'll put gears on you and a cord around your waist. One of us will pull you out while the two others will jump on you to protect you as most as possible. Is everything clear? Do you have any question?"

- "No," answered Jane.

- "Good."

The man gave the megaphone to the Lieutenant, before going back on work with his two men. Moussa, who equipped himself with a gear, followed the red flags and stopped as close as possible of her.

- "You look ridiculous," joked Jane with a serious tone.

- "How are you?" asked Moussa.

- "I don't wanna die."

The girl gulped with difficulties while sweats were flowing on her face.

- "You won't die."

- "Why not!? And, even if I don't die, I could lose my leg or break my spine while they jump on me! If it happens, Max won't be as patient as before, she doesn't want to live that again, she will leave, and I can't blame her for this!"

- "Jane! You won't die and you won't lose you leg! You'll be okay, I know that," affirmed Moussa.

- "I, I don't wanna be like that again. I hated the Jane I was, only able

to feel pain and anger and sadness, hurting everyone around because she wanted them to suffer too. I don't want to hurt people, it's not fair!"

- "You won't hurt people because nothing will happen to you, I won't let them fail, believe me."

- "Yeah...You know, I can't stop thinking that everything could stop in one second. I spent months in Somalia and I never stressed this much as now! It doesn't make sense..."

- "It makes sense, you know why? Because, in Somalia, you were in a danger place with Death at every corner, but here, in New-York, you're just supposed to wake up, go to work, and go back home, safely, and not spend half of your day on a mine. But you won't explode, if I had to cover your body with mine, I'll do it."

- "If you do that, I kill you," told Jane with a small amused smile.

- "I know, but it'll be worth it," smirked Moussa.

Jane didn't dare to playfully shake her head, but she was glad Moussa was here with her.

- "I didn't kiss her," said Jane.

- "Max?"

- "Yeah...Since I'm back, I never kissed her and now, I want to. I don't wanna her to think that I don't love her, even if I didn't show her properly. She doesn't deserve that."

- "Listen, when you are out of this, you'll call her, what do you think?"

- "Yeah, why not, but I want my pizza first!"

- "As you want," chuckled Moussa.

Jane lightly nodded. Every time a bead of sweat was falling from her forehead, she thought it could explode and felt her heart stopping. She knew many types of mines, and some were very sensitive, but

she couldn't see on which mine she was. Her legs were numb, and her back was hurting, she wanted to bend her legs so much, but she couldn't. And the sun was making things worse, she was sure she was having a beginning of a heatstroke, feeling dizzy and sick.

After two hours, they asked Moussa to go in the safe place. He grumbled but obeyed. The men put a gear on Jane and a cord around her waist. One of them was holding tight the cord, ready to pull, while two men were in front of her.

- "You're ready?" asked their boss.

- "Can we be ready for something like that?"

- "I take that as a yes."

- "If I don't make it," told quickly Jane. "I wanted to thank all of you, for your work, and risking your lives just for me."

The men just nodded with a small smile. The leader counted from three to one. Jane felt her body projected behind, before hearing an explosion and feeling two bodies on her. Her ears were buzzing, and she was dizzy, but her legs were still there. The two men stood and helped her to do the same. Moussa ran to her and wrapped his arms around her before raising her.

- "I told you you will make it!"

- "Yeah, yeah, put me on the floor," chuckled the brunette.

- "Yeah, sorry..."

He placed her again on the ground and helped her to walk away from this field. A doctor examined her and gave her some water and something to eat before letting her go. Moussa brought her back to the police station, where a pizza was waiting for her on her desk.

- "God, a pizza!" smiled Jane.

- "I told you you would eat it," said Moussa.

- "(opens the box) And with lots of cheese! So cool!"

The two friends sat at their desks and began to eat.

- "So? You're not gonna call Max?"

- "No, I don't want adrenaline to talk for me," answered Jane. "I would say stupid things."

- "That's smart."

- "I'll talk to her tonight. And I don't want to worry her while she is working, she has other things to do."

- "You'll have to go in a psychological support unit?" asked Moussa.

- "Is it a real question? I obviously have to do it," told Jane with a smile.

The two friends chuckled. They spent the end of the day listing the evidence they found and filling files. As they were just officer, they couldn't participate to the investigation, but, after a day like that, they saw no problem with this.

When they finished their work, the two friends were finally able to go back home. Moussa drove Jane back, as usual.

Jane barely entered her apartment that Max appeared quickly from the kitchen.

- "Oh my god, you're finally here! I thought something happened to you!" told the redhead.

- "Sorry, I forgot to call, I didn't want to worry you," apologized Jane.

- "It's fine, now you're here."

Jane nodded and took off her coat. She didn't wait one more second and took her girlfriend in her arms. Max got surprised but didn't hesitate to tighten it.

- "I walked on a mine today," said calmly Jane.

- "WHAT!?" replied Max, breaking the hug.

The redhead bent and touched Jane's legs to be sure they were still here.

- "I'm okay, I'm okay, don't worry," reassured the brunette.
- "Don't worry!?! Jane! You fucking walked on a mine! How are you!?"
- "I'm fine, I see a psychologist tomorrow for this, it will be okay."
- "God! You can't have a normal day at work!?"
- "...Apparently not..."

Max sighed before hugging her again.

- "What did you think about?" asked Max.
- "I thought of Lucas at first, but then, just you. I knew if I lost my leg, you wouldn't stay this time."
- "Don't be stupid, I would stay. I'm happy I didn't give up on you."
- "I'm happy too."

The redhead tightened the hug and hid her face on her girlfriend's neck. Even if Jane was saying she was fine, Max was sure it affected her more than she was showing.

- "Can I kiss you?" murmured Jane in Max's ear.
- "Are you sure?"
- "More than sure."
- "Yes, of course you can, you don't need to ask."

Max felt Jane's hot breath on her neck. Jane broke the hug, looked at Max with hearts in her eyes, and leaned to her. When Max felt Jane's lips on hers, a million of butterflies appeared in her belly. She had never felt so much joy for a long time. She had waited this moment for so many times. When Jane broke the kiss, the two girls were blushing and smiling. Max opened her arms for another hug, hiding her face in her neck again.

- "I love you," whispered Max.

- "I love you too."

The redhead's heart stopped. It was too much, she wasn't expecting such an answer. She felt the tears coming and didn't even try to hold them. She began to lightly sob while caressing Jane's neck with her left hand and tensing her right hand on her back.

Jane felt a pinch in her heart. She knew she was crying because she was tired by all of this. She felt guilty for her sadness and didn't know what to do for her. She just tightened the hug with her, rubbing her back, and kissed her temple. It wasn't enough, she knew it.

- "I'm sorry," apologized softly the brunette.

- "No, it's not you..." sniffed Max. "I'm relieved that you're okay now."

- "I'm sorry for slapping you..."

- "I know, I know, I already forgave you, stop blaming yourself for having PTSD, you don't deserve it."

- "Okay..."

- "I prepared tagliatelle with salmon."

- "I love you more."

The two girls chuckled before breaking the hug. Jane placed a kiss on Max's cheek before wiping her tears with her thumbs. The redhead kissed her girlfriend before smiling, grabbing her hand, and taking her to the kitchen. As Abigail was out with Troy and Juan, the two girls were alone, enjoying each other's presence. It was a perfect night for the two girls.

33. Butterfly

Jane woke up in a start with a heavy breathing. She checked her legs to know if they were still there before rolling on her back and putting her hands on her face.

- "Fuck," lightly sighed the brunette.

- "Are you okay?" mumbled Max.

Jane had another start.

- "Shit, you scared me!"

- "Sorry," pouted the redhead.

- "It's fine. I didn't want to wake you up..."

- "It's okay, calm your breath."

- "I'm trying!"

Max rolled on her right side, lighted on the lamp on the nightstand, placed her hand on Jane's chest, and began to breath with her. Jane's fast breathing was calming, becoming slower.

- "Great, see? You did it," smiled Max.

- "Only thanks to you."

- "You still did it. You had another nightmare?"

- "Yeah...Since I went on this mine field weeks ago, I can't stop thinking that I could have lost my legs like Lucas!" explained Jane.

- "I know..."

- "I should maybe come with you tomorrow. Maybe seeing him will click something, I don't know..."

- "It's a good idea, I'm sure he'll be happy to see you."

- "Yeah...I'm not that sure..."

- "He always asked me how you are, I think he is not mad at you anymore."

- "I hope you're right."

- "I am."

Max quickly kissed her girlfriend before wetting a tissue and wiping Jane's sweat. When she finished, she noticed that Jane was looking at her with a smile.

- "What?" asked Max with an amused tone.

- "Nothing, I'm just admiring you."

- "Don't be stupid, it's the middle of night, I slept only a few hours, I certainly look like an old panda."

- "A hot old panda."

- "Pfff, stop that," chuckled the redhead.

Jane leaned and kissed her girlfriend passionately, sliding her hands under her tee-shirt. They, then, rolled, Max under Jane now. The redhead travelled her hands in Jane's hair while the brunette was bringing her hips closer to Max's. The redhead broke the kiss and gently pushed Jane.

- "We can't do that, Abigail is sleeping in the room next to ours," murmured Max.

- "She is a log!" answered Jane.

- "I don't wanna take the risk, it could be very embarrassing for her."

- "(sighs with her mouth) Why did we have to have a child!" joked Jane with an annoyed tone.

- "It was your idea," chuckled Max, lightly pressing Jane's nose.

- "Yeah, I'm too kind."

- "It wasn't a bad idea, she changed, because of you, it's a good thing."

- "Yeah, it is," smiled the brunette.

Jane kissed multiple times Max before rolling on her back. The two girls fell asleep again, frustrated but happy.

The next morning was hard. The two girls joined Abigail in the kitchen who prepared some coffee for them. Jane was sitting in front of the blonde girl while Max was standing, taking support on a piece of furniture.

- "If you were an animal, what would you be?" asked Abigail.

- "If you answer a pig, I kill you," told Jane.

- "She asked an animal you would be, not what you already are!" joked the redhead.

- "Haha."

- "But, to answer your question, Jane is definitely a cat."

- "Oh yeah, I was thinking the same!" said the blonde girl.

- "I can't deny it, I'm totally a cat!"

- "Always wants affection, hugs, kisses, and all," smiled Max.

- "Yeah, totally true! And what about Max? What would she be?"

- "A rat, always rejected of kitchens," chuckled Jane.

Max opened her mouth of shocked before gently pushing Jane's head and accompanying Abigail in her laugh.

- "That's so awful and so fucking true!" stated the redhead.

- "Yeah, I know," smiled the brunette. "But, more seriously, she would be a lioness."

- "A lioness?"

- "Yeah, you're strong, you're protecting, you don't hesitate to tell people what you think, and all those things."

- "Aww, that's cute!"

Max wrapped her arm around Jane's head and kissed the top of it.

- "And Abigail? What kind of animal would she be?" asked Max.

- "Something like a bird," answered Jane.

- "A bird?" frowned Abigail.

- "Yeah, always talking and all."

- "You're the worst person I know!"

- "I know," smiled Jane. "Or, you could be a butterfly."

- "A butterfly? It's interesting, but why?"

- "Because before you were a horrible caterpillar who turned into a nice butterfly."

- "Aw, Jane, you can be nice when you want!" joked Max.

- "I try!"

- "I know it will sound stupid, but I feel like it was a compliment," softly smiled Abigail.

- "It was."

The blonde girl smiled more but didn't dare to look at them. She wondered if they were considering her as their friend, but her, she was sure that they were her friends now.

- "You know," began Abigail, "I found an apartment to live and, don't panic if you still see me around, it's because I'm in the building in front of yours, but, I didn't want to go too far, having you next to me kinda reassure me, but...anyway, you're just finally finding each other again, and I don't want to block you from having private moments..."

- "I think she heard us," murmured Jane.
- "I told you she would!" replied Max.
- "It's fine, it's just, I had been looking for an apartment for a moment and I finally found one so, I won't be a burden for you anymore."
- "A burden!? You're not a burden, don't be stupid!"
- "Well, as I'm going to ask you to help me with furniture and all..."
- "Our child is growing up so fast!" joked Jane.
- "You never stop!" chuckled Max, giving a gently tap on her shoulder. "If you need help, we're here for you. And even after, I mean, you're still welcomed here!"
- "Really?" asked the blonde girl with a small voice.
- "Yeah, I mean, we're friends, right?"
- "Yeah, totally!"

Abigail was so happy to hear that, that she jumped from her chair to hug the two girls. It was the first time she had felt a true friendship in her entire life. Those two girls were actually caring of how she felt and ready to help her, no matter what, forgiving her for what she did. She didn't know where she would be without them. They saved her life.

34. Recipes

Max and Jane were not working today, so they went to Lucas and Gabrielle's apartment. It was planned for Max, but Jane wasn't supposed to come at first. But she seemed ready to see Lucas again, like if she wanted to draw a line under what happened, it was a good thing. They arrived in front of the door, Jane behind, but Max didn't knock immediately.

- "You're okay?" asked Max.

- "Maybe they don't wanna see me, I mean, it was my fault..."

- "It wasn't your fault, Jane; they know that."

- "I don't know..."

- "(holds out her hand) Come on, it will be fine. She told me if you wanna come, you were welcomed. Everything changed."

Jane nodded and grabbed her hand. Max placed a kiss on it before knocking. Gabrielle almost instantly opened it and had a surprised and happy expression when she looked at Jane.

- "You came!" stated the black-haired girl. "I knew you would come, (turns her head behind) I told you she would come!"

- "I'm glad you win then!" answered Lucas from the inside.

Gabrielle was so happy that she took her in her arms. Jane got surprised at first, but then relieved. She wrapped her arms around her too. The black-haired girl broke the hug and invited them to enter. Lucas was waiting them, standing, a crutch in his right hand.

- "Oh my god! You're standing! You finally found the right prothesis!" stated Max with excitement.

- "Yeah, and after weeks of rehabilitation, I can finally walk, it's not perfect but, it's better than nothing."

- "I'm so proud of you!"

The redhead took him in her arms and realized he was smelling good. While this moment, Gabrielle took Jane's arm to invite her to come closer to them. The brunette was still uncomfortable with it, she still thought she was responsible for his leg. Gabrielle rubbed her back while Max broke the hug with Lucas and went to her girlfriend to hold her hand.

- "Two girls at your arms and you only look at me, I'm honored," joked Lucas.

Jane had a small amused sigh but looked down, feeling a bit embarrassed.

- "We should let you talk alone," proposed Gabrielle.

- "If you need us, we're in the kitchen," added Max.

The two girls kissed their lovers before leaving and putting their ears on the door to listen. Jane was looking around, avoiding eyes contact with him.

- "I'm sorry for telling you it was your fault," apologized Lucas.

- "Don't be, you were right..."

- "I was wrong, more than wrong. Blaming you was stupid, I should have supported you after, and helped you, but I didn't. I preferred looking for a responsible than realizing we were all feeling bad and losing our minds."

- "Yeah, we fucking lost it!" stated Jane with a small smile.

- "We did."

- "Sorry for your jaw, by the way."

- "It's fine, it was full of shit anyway."

Jane nodded and pinched her lips together.

- "I heard you had a complicated first day?"

- "Oh, yeah...you know, um, I, I-"
- "Max told me you were on a mine, relax," smiled Lucas.
- "Oh, okay, well, I'm not gonna lie, I thought of you this day, even if Max took your place rapidly."
- "I hope she did, you needed to think of something positive, seeing me with one leg wasn't a good idea. How are you?"
- "I've nightmares again since this day..." explained Jane.
- "Oh..."
- "Yeah...What about you? You work or something like that?"
- "I work in a garage, it's pretty cool. If one day you're tired to be a cop, I'm sure there will be a place for you in there."
- "Yeah? I don't know, for now, I'm good with my work."
- "Okay, cool, no problem," smiled Lucas. "We're good?"
- "We're good."

Lucas had a big smile on his face before giving a friendly tap on her shoulder. They joined their girlfriends in the kitchen and began to eat. The ambience was warm and relaxed. The four friends really spent a good moment together, able to finally have fun with no worries.

- "Did Bev call you?" asked Lucas.
- "For?" frowned Jane.
- "She finished her report, she wants us to watch it together when it's broadcasted, what do you think?"
- "I, I don't know...I'm not sure I really like watching me."
- "You can say no, you know," told Max.
- "No, I think it's important for Bev, I can watch her work. When is

it?"

- "Next week," answered Gabrielle.

- "If it's not a problem for you, Jane, they could come to our apartment, we have a bigger couch," proposed the redhead.

- "Yeah, sounds good for me," weakly smiled Jane.

Max intertwined her fingers with Jane's. She was so proud of her, Jane seemed ready to keep living, and watching this report with Beverly and Lucas was the proof of it. And Bev would be so happy to have them with her.

At the end of the afternoon, Jane and Max left the apartment of their friends to go back to theirs. When they entered, Abigail was asleep on the couch with a ring binder on her chest. Max and Jane looked at each other, then, Max slammed the door, waking up the blonde girl. Abigail opened her eyes with difficulties but recognized the two girls.

- "Oh, hi, how was your...lunch?" asked the girl, sitting and putting the ring binder on the coffee table.

- "It was cool, we had lots of fun," told Max. "You're reading my recipes?"

- "Um, yeah, they're cute."

- "Cute?"

- "Yeah, (Jane leaves the room to take a shower) I mean, all the notes you write, it's all about Jane, what she likes, what she doesn't like, which one she prefers, what kind of cream she digests, the ones to avoid, and all of this. It's pretty cute. You even wrote which recipes to do with all of her mood, when she is angry, sad, or happy. I mean I would love someone to do the same for me! It's so cool, you're the definition of love."

- "Oh, thank you, I don't know if we're the definition of love but, we're doing our best."

- "Come on, I wish I was lesbian to flirt with you."

- "Okay, calm down!" chuckled the redhead.
- "You even have an entire menu dedicated to your friends, "The Party"! The "Crusty Dusty", "Lucas's burger", "Picky Mickey", "Wave Bev", "Cute Will", and "Sweat Jane". That's impressive!"
- "Yeah, I'm still working on it, I want them to be perfect," smiled Max.
- "They already look delicious."
- "Yeah? I prefer when it's the concerned one who tastes their recipes, but I can cook some for you, if you want."
- "Really!? I would love to! Like a last meal before leaving you!"
- "Yeah, why not," chuckled the redhead.
- "How are you gonna call your restaurant?"
- "MadMax!"
- "'Can't wait to see it."

The two girls kept reading Max's recipes. The redhead felt nostalgic by reading this, remembering when she made Jane taste them and took notes of her reaction to make it better the next time. She didn't think of it before, but she could create a recipe for Abigail too, now. After everything that happened, she deserved her name in the menu. She would think about it.

35. The report

One week passed. Jane and Moussa were back in patrol. Jane didn't really like that, it was car crashes majority of the time, it reminded her some bad memories. Tonight, Moussa was driving back Jane, but, this time, he stayed. Bev's report was going to be broadcasted and everyone was there, waiting for it to begin. Moussa, Max, and Gabrielle were in the kitchen talking and observing their lovers sitting as far as possible of each other, all stressing. Abigail entered the apartment and noticed the three persons.

- "Wow, big ambience!" joked Abigail.
- "We're waiting for the report," mumbled Jane.
- "I know, Max told me."
- "You're gonna stay?"
- "I don't know, you want me to?"

Jane shrugged.

- "As you want, I don't care."
- "Okay, I'll think about it. Where is the other half?"
- "Kitchen."

Abigail smiled to her and joined the three others in the kitchen. Even if she was comfortable with Moussa and Max now, it was still complicated with Gabrielle, the black-haired girl was more than cold with her.

- "Um, hey," saluted the blonde girl.
- "Hey, you're staying for the report?" asked the redhead.
- "I don't know, she told me I could, but if you don't think it's a good idea, I can stay in my room."

- "I don't think they really care; they're stressing so much about it that we could be one million in the room that they wouldn't care."

- "Okay, I guess I can sit in a corner then."

- "Yeah, that's the best thing to do," told coldly Gabrielle.

- "Gab, stop that!" intervened Max.

- "I can't, okay!? She had been awful with the entire school and especially your girlfriend, and now she thinks she can be friend with you and her!?"

- "But, she is our friend! We forgave her, and she helped me a lot with Jane! You don't have to be friend with her, but I don't want you to be disrespectful with her, she was a dick, life made her pay and now she keeps going, and she can count on us to help her."

Gabrielle crossed her arms and sighed with her nose.

- "Fine! It's your problem," stated Gabrielle.

- "Exactly. Now, let's support our lovers."

The three others agreed and followed her in the living-room. Abigail sat on the armchair, wanting to let them some space. Jane was at the left of the couch, then Max, Gabrielle, Lucas, Moussa, and finally Beverly.

When the report began, Jane quickly grabbed Max's hand. The redhead could feel that she was shaking. She tried to relax her by rubbing it, but Jane was stressing too much to relax. It would be like that the entire report, the only way to calm them was to just wait this to end.

It lasted almost two hours. Bev spent her time shaking her head in disbelief, while Lucas and Jane couldn't stop changing their position until the half of the report. When it ended, no one dared to talk, except Bev:

- "What a bunch of assholes!"

- "Why?" frowned Moussa.
- "They censored everything! And they cut the most important part! They fucked up my work!"
- "It wasn't that bad," said Abigail.
- "But it wasn't what I wanted to show!"
- "Okay, calm down, it's done now," told Moussa, trying to reassure her.

Bev angrily stood and went to the French door to watch outside. Moussa pouted and turned to watch Max and Gabrielle, but the two girls were looking at their lovers who seemed confused and angry.

- "Jane?" called Lucas with a strong voice.
- "Yeah. I heard."

The two stood and went next to Bev, looking outside too.

- "You have a copy of that?" asked Jane with a serious tone.
- "Of course! Why?"
- "I need to watch it again, to be sure."
- "Sure of what?" frowned the redhead.
- "Daniel," answered Lucas.
- "Daniel? Why?"
- "He said some weird things. I just want to know if I'm wrong or not," told Jane. "And if I could have your interviews and notebooks, I would appreciate."
- "You'll have them, no problem, but tell me why."
- "We think he told the rebels where we were," answered Lucas.
- "What!? Why!?"

- "He said many things about the rebels that we didn't know, and, at a moment, just before we left for our last mission, we can hear him talk Somali on a walkie-talkie which was not a military one."

- "And he is the only one who got out of them with no injuries," added Jane.

- "He was a messenger, it was why he could go, no?" asked Bev.

- "Oh yeah, but Joe was a messenger, and he can't walk anymore."

- "...Yeah, that's right...you really think he betrayed us?"

- "I'll figure it out."

- "Okay, I'll come to your police station tomorrow with everything, is it okay?"

- "Yeah, perfect, thank you. And your report wasn't that bad, I'm kinda glad they censored some things, like, my stupid face."

- "I wanted to shock people, to make them understand how war is! And I would prefer seeing your stupid face, I love your stupid face."

- "I know," weakly smiled Jane.

The four others couldn't hear what they were saying, and Max began to wonder if they were okay, so she decided to stand and going to them.

- "Is everything okay?" asked softly the redhead.

- "Yes, we were complimenting her report," answered Jane.

- "Yeah? It was a really good one, even if you're frustrated. If this was good, I can't imagine how amazing your original work would be."

- "Thank you," smiled Bev.

- "Now that it's over, you wanna eat something? We have rests of pizza of the day before."

- "I would love to eat pizzas right now," told Lucas.

- "I'll take one too," said Beverly.
- "Okay, two pizzas, what about you?"
- "Yeah, I'll take one," answered Jane.

Max kissed Jane's shoulder before going to the kitchen, reheating pizzas for everyone. Gabrielle followed her to help her while the others went on the balcony and installed chairs and a table on it to enjoy the warm weather and the beautiful light sky full of stars. The two girls arrived with the pizzas and served everyone before sitting with their lovers. They barely talked about the report, knowing it could create some useless stress.

- "It's you who made the pizzas!?" asked Lucas.
- "Um, yeah, why?" frowned Max.
- "Because it's amazing! Damn!"
- "Italian recipes," told Jane with a proud tone.
- "It's better in a wood oven, but the one we have is quite good."
- "God, I'm going to buy a wood oven if it's even better!"
- "Yes please!" said enthusiastically Jane.

They stayed a moment on this balcony, having fun together. Seeing Lucas, Beverly, and Jane like that was a pleasure for everyone. Months ago, they thought it was the end for all of them, they never thought they would end on this balcony to eat pizzas.

When they finished, Moussa, Bev, Lucas, and Gabrielle left the apartment, letting Abigail, Jane, and Max alone. The blonde girl took a quick shower before directly going to bed. Max was in the bathroom, brushing her teeth, when Jane joined her, hugged her from behind; rubbing her belly; and kissed her neck.

- "You know I'm on my period, right?" told Max.
- "I know, and I know it hurts too, I don't know if it's work, but I

thought my hands could magically decrease your pain."

- "It does, if you move your hands, I kill you."

- "Alright my lord," smiled Jane.

Max finished to clean her mouth on the sink before straightening again. She noticed that Jane was lost in her thoughts with a worried expression. She hoped this report didn't bring her back her PTSD. She kissed her cheek to bring her back to reality.

- "You're okay? You seem preoccupied."

- "Uh, yeah, just...nothing, I'll see tomorrow, I can't do anything here anyway," answered Jane.

- "Okay. We should go to sleep," said softly Max.

The redhead grabbed Jane's hand and took her to their bed. Since they were sleeping together, Max had better nights. Not just because Jane was in the bed, but because Jane was feeling better, and it took a big weight off.

36. Documents

As it was Summer, Jane didn't sleep a lot because of the heat. She hated Summer. Jane and Max chose an apartment with at least two chambers to sleep in better condition during Summer. But, as they hadn't slept together for a while, none of them wanted to separate for now. And at work, it was worse. All these men in the same room were increasing the heat so much that it was unbreathable! They were trying to fill their files while their bodies were melting on their chairs. Beverly arrived during the afternoon with a backpack which she put on Jane's desk.

- "I'm sorry to arrive this late, I'm not working today so I didn't really wake up early this morning..."

- "It's fine, don't wor—"

- "And then, I had to search for everything you asked, but I didn't have all in my desk!

- "It's okay, I unders—"

- "So I went to my work, to take it back, but the bus was soooo slow, I still can't believe it!"

- "(grabs her wrist) Bev! It's perfect, thank you," smiled Jane.

- "Yeah, sorry, what you told me yesterday totally...stressed me! I hope you'll find what you're looking for in this," said the redhead.

Jane began to look at the things that Bev brought her.

- "The tape is inside?" asked the brunette.

- "Yes."

- "It's a good beginning."

- "If you need anything, you ask me."

- "Yeah? Can I keep this picture?"

Jane showed a picture of Bev, Lucas, and herself during their first day in Somalia, all smiling and close to each other.

- "Of course, I've copies of it, I love this picture too," softly smiled Bev.

- "It will look good on my desk."

- "Yeah...Thank you for coming yesterday."

- "Well, it was at my home!"

- "No, don't be stupid, you know what I mean."

- "Yeah. No problem, we're still friends, right?" told Jane.

- "Of course."

Jane slid her hand from Bev's wrist to her hand. The two girls were looking at each other with a soft smile.

- "If Max was there, she would be wondering if something happened between us," joked Jane.

- "Oh yeah?"

- "Yeah, she thought something happened between us in Somalia."

- "I'm sure Moussa thought the same."

- "No, I didn't!" answered Moussa.

- "Not even a little bit?"

- "...Maybe, but I trust you so, not for long."

- "Anyway, thanks for the documents, I'll watch this tape again and again!" said Jane.

- "Good luck," smiled Bev. "When do you have a break?"

- "Now, if you want," answered Moussa.

- "Cool."

The black man stood and took his girlfriend's hand before leaving the room with her, letting Jane alone. The brunette quickly finished her files and began to watch the tape. She understood better why it was censored and why Bev told them she wanted to shock, it was more than shocking! And the entire moment when Bev was with Karim was cut, which was stupid because it showed the real life of the Somalians. American censorship, as always! Anyway, she arrived at the part she wanted to see. She watched it again and again, trying to note what he was saying. When Moussa came back, she was still watching it. Daniel was repeating again and again the same sentence. She didn't know what it meant, but she tried to write it the best way she could.

- "You should take a break, you've been on this video for three hours," told Moussa.

- "Three hours!? (looks at her watch) Damn! That's true!"

- "Yeah, quite long."

- "I need to learn Somalia's language. But now, I need more information on Daniel."

- "Oh, I don't like it!"

- "I'm just gonna ask, that's all!"

- "Be careful, a cop investigating on a military is never a good thing!"

- "If this military is a traitor, it's not bad!"

- "I hope you're right..."

- "I'm sure I am."

- "Don't do that because you think finding a responsible will repair everything," told Moussa.

- "I'm not! Even Lucas noticed weird things about him!" got irritated Jane.

- "Okay, okay, sorry..."

Jane spent the afternoon on the phone, trying to convince every people she had to give her some information about Daniel, but the army was worse than a grave. None of them cooperated, even when she said it was for an investigation. So, she decided to visit them. She took her military card to enter easily. After twenty minutes, she was finally inside. She didn't stop at the secretary and went directly through the corridors, ignoring her ex colleagues asking her why she was there. She burst into her former boss office.

- "Brown!? What does that mean!?"

- "I need to talk to you. Privately."

The colonel made a movement with his head to tell the others to leave the room. They all looked at Jane with angry eyes before leaving.

- "So, what can I do for you?"

- "I need Daniel Johns's file."

- "For what!?" got upset the colonel.

- "An investigation."

- "You really want to do an investigation on one of your colleagues, Brown!?"

- "Ex colleague. I've suspicions about his honesty."

- "Having suspicions about someone's honesty is not enough to stick your nose into someone's life like that! Just because you're a pig now doesn't mean you're above the laws!"

- "I think he told the rebels for our last mission."

- "Wh-uh, these are really serious accusations, you know that!? It can ruin this man's career!"

- "If he ruined my life, I don't know why I should care about his

career," said coldly Jane.

- "You're skating on thin ice, you know that!?"

- "I take the risk."

- "Not me. Now leave. Do I have to ask someone to see you out!?"

- "I know the way."

- "Good."

Jane left the office without making the military salute and slammed the door behind her. She knew he wouldn't give her the file, but it was lunch time, and she knew that the secretary was empty. She waited for the woman to leave the room before sneaking inside. The computer was still switched on. She had to be quick; anyone could arrive at any moment. She found rapidly his file and sent the impression.

- "Come on, come on," mumbled Jane.

The last paper appeared, and Jane didn't wait more to take them. She quickly hid them in her jacket before quickly leaving the building. She had never walked so fast in her entire life.

When she arrived at the police station, she quickly hid the documents in her papers before hearing:

- "BROWN! In my office! NOW!"

The brunette tensed her face and looked at Moussa who pouted. She knew why he wanted to see her.

- "How dare you asking private information on one of our colleagues!" got angry the Lieutenant.

- "He is not our colleague!"

- "THE ARMY ARE OUR COLLEAGUES! Is it clear!?"

- "Yes," answered Jane.

- "Good. Go back to work."

Jane nodded and followed his order. It could have been worse. She sat at her desk and began to read her documents. She was sure to find answers in this.

37. Jealousy

Jane spent the next days scrutinizing every line, every information, and every word she could. Things began to be clearer and clearer; Daniel was really suspect. She reunited all the information and showed them to Lucas and Bev, then Moussa. All three agreed with her, something was wrong. Moussa went with Jane when she showed it to their boss, and even him thought it was weird, so they opened an investigation. Jane wasn't allowed to participate as she was concerned, and neither Moussa, too close of the three victims, but the Lieutenant would keep them in touch every time they would have new evidence. She hoped the fact that he was a military wouldn't affect the investigator's judgement on this case, it was important for the girl.

But today, Abigail was moving. She didn't have lots of things in the two girls' apartment, but they bought furniture and had to install it. Beverly and Abigail were organizing the furniture while Moussa, Max, and Jane were bringing by the stairs the last one: the fridge. After long struggles in the stairs, the three friends finally reached the apartment.

- "Do you need help?" asked Abigail.

- "We just did four floors with this fridge in our arms, but those last meters are certainly the hardest ones!" answered Max with a red face and beads of sweats flowing on her temples and forehead.

- "The kitchen is on your left," chuckled the blonde girl.

Moussa, Max, and Jane finally installed the fridge, freeing their hands.

- "Look at my fingers!" told Jane. "I can't stretch them out!"

Max and Moussa looked at Jane's red hands before looking at theirs. They were in the same struggle. Beverly entered the kitchen and began to massage her boyfriend's hands.

- "What about us!?" replied Max.

- "Relax, I'll take care of you too," chuckled Bev.

- "I can massage you, if you want," proposed Abigail.

Max held out her hands to her, making smile Abigail. While Moussa and Max were having a massage, Jane was trying to relax her hands by her own. When she noticed her struggling, Bev let go Moussa's hands, which were feeling better, and massaged Jane's hands.

- "You don't seem bad at it!" stated Max.

- "She massaged me many times in Somalia," told Jane.

- "Really?"

- "Yeah, I mean, my hands and my knee, that's all."

- "..."

- "Nothing happened!"

- "I know!"

- "Why are you so jealous then!?"

- "I'm not! You're just very close to each other, more than before, it's just...weird, for now, but I know there is nothing between you and her!"

- "Okay! Stop looking at us like that!"

Max rolled her eyes and sighed with her nose, upset. Jane shook her head in disbelief, looking away. Bev preferred stopping the massage, not wanting to create tensions between them.

The group of friends finished to install everything, relaxing a bit the atmosphere. Once everything done, the two couples let Abigail alone, discovering a new life in her new apartment.

Jane and Max just had to cross the road to be at their apartment. When they entered, both were still mad.

- "What was that!? You really think I had time to cheat on you with

Bev!?" replied Jane.

- "No! I never said that!" answered Max with the same tone.

- "You implied it enough!"

- "I didn't imply anything!"

- "Yes, you did! You're the one working with the girl you kissed when I was sick and I'm completely fine with it! Why can't you trust me!?"

- "I do trust you! It's not about you and her like that!"

- "Then what's the problem!?"

- "She doesn't wanna hang out with me anymore!"

- "...Oh..."

- "Yeah, oh! Every time I call her to know if she wanna see a movie or eat somewhere she asks me if you're coming, and when I say no, she says she doesn't have time or something like that! I'm glad you're close to her, but she is not close to me anymore, and I miss her..." confessed Max.

- "Uh, I'm sorry, I didn't know...Why didn't you tell me?" asked Jane with a calmer tone.

- "Because, you had enough with Daniel and your work, I didn't want to bother you with this..."

- "That's stupid! I'm here for that too! You always listen to me crying or yelling, you can do the same! And feeling like you're losing a friend is hard, and I can understand how it feels, I mean, I lost many friends when I was in school."

- "You think I'm losing her?"

- "I think she is still fragile. You know, when we were in Somalia, she tried to hide it, but every steps she was making was an ordeal and, we became closer because I tried to spend as much time as possible with her, playing cards or talking shit, I guess it reassured her, and

now, she is trying to live again, and maybe she needs to..."cut the cord", I guess. I don't know if it's clear."

- "It is. What am I supposed to do?"

- "I don't know...Maybe you could begin to invite her here, like that, I'm here, but I stay behind to give you some space with her, and I could maybe talk to her if it doesn't work. What do you think?"

- "Sounds good."

- "Okay, cool. Next time talk to me, I can listen to you, now," smiled Jane.

- "I know, I'm sorry..."

Jane opened her arms to propose a hug to her girlfriend. Max had a small smile and accepted it. The two girls tightened their arms around each other, warming both hearts.

- "I hate you for being this cute," told Max.

- "I know," lightly chuckled Jane.

The redhead broke the hug to kiss her. The two girls spent the end of the day together, sat on the couch, unable to do something else because of this big fridge! They couldn't move anymore! They went to bed, snuggled, and fell asleep instantly.

38. Phone call

Jane was awake but didn't open her eyes. She was enjoying so much Max's caresses that she didn't want it to stop when she opened her eyes.

- "I know you're awake," told the redhead.

- "I'm not," mumbled Jane.

The brunette opened one eye and looked at her girlfriend who was smiling to her. Jane straightened a bit and placed her head closer to Max's.

- "How can you know if I'm asleep or not?"

- "You've a tic when you sleep."

- "Really?"

- "Yeah, you quickly stretch your middle finger."

- "All night long?" frowned Jane.

- "All night long."

- "Damn, it explains why I'm always tired!"

- "Pfff, don't search an excuse for your lazy ass," mocked Max.

- "My middle finger is taking all my energy, it's not my fault!"

Max playfully shook her head. She felt Jane's hot body snuggling against hers, wrapping her legs and arms around her, and placing her head in her neck. The redhead felt a pleasant heat in her stomach and her heart racing. With their works it became rare to stay in bed with her. None of them wanted to move, enjoying too much each other.

While Max was caressing her girlfriend's hair, she was remembering all those years after high school. She left the USA to leave for Italia for one year. She met lots of amazing cooks, learnt how to make

pizzas, ice cream, and pastas like Italian people. Jane took the plane to see her when she had free times. They visited South of Italia, where the pizzica was born, the dance that Jane and Troy used to dance before. They went in Roma too, discovering the driving of big town. Jane almost got crazy. But the town was beautiful, it was worth it.

Max then moved in France, to learn French gastronomic. She went in Paris and felt in love with the town, contrary to Jane who preferred countrysides. But the brunette liked the food a lot, even snails! For Christmas, they went to the Alps to ski. Jane fell the fourth day, just before Christmas night. She had to go to hospital because she wrecked her knee. She was so mad, she thought she had ruined their vacation, but Max spent an amazing week with her, it was all she needed, she didn't need to ski the last days. But the redhead was worrying that it could be a problem for the police academy; it was already complicated because she was a girl, she didn't want their vacation to ruin everything.

When she was done with France, she went in Switzerland and learnt how to make chocolate. Jane didn't come in Switzerland, having too much to do in the police academy.

Then she went in Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Britain, and finally Spain. It was quick, she just stays the time to learn about the specialties of each countries before coming back to New-York to live with Jane.

They found easily their apartment, but Jane was finishing the police academy and couldn't find a police station to accept her. Moussa tried to convince his boss to give her a chance, but the man was categorical, there were better persons for this job. And the bad idea happened, she decided to train for the army and went in Somalia with Lucas and Beverly. She wished she convinced her to not do it.

She heard Jane's stomach gurgling and looked down at her with a smile. Jane had her eyes wide opened, surprised by the sound.

- "I think I'm hungry," told Jane.

- "I think too," chuckled the redhead.

The brunette straightened and kissed her girlfriend before breaking the hug and standing. Max sighed of laziness, watching Jane putting a pair of jeans and a tee-shirt. The brunette smiled to her and held out her hands to help her to stand. Max sighed again but let Jane getting her out of the bed.

Once in the kitchen, Jane prepared herself some coffee, and Max prepared toast. The brunette brought the two cups of coffee on the table and sat in front of the redhead.

- "I like taking my breakfast at lunch time," joked Max.

- "You want some pastas with your toast?" mocked Jane.

- "Ew, no thanks, it's too early for weird mixings."

Jane chuckled and shook her head before taking a long sip of her hot coffee.

- "You've a file to finish today?" asked Max.

- "Yeah, for tomorrow. It's not gonna be long, but I've to do it," pouted Jane.

- "Yeah, not really fascinating."

- "No, not really. What are you gonna do?"

- "Sleep, I guess."

- "Nice program, I'm envious!"

- "Well, if you finish early you can join me," smirked the redhead.

- "You know we won't sleep if I join you," smiled Jane.

- "I hope we won't."

Jane tried to hold her smile but her cheeks were burning so much that she thought it was useless. Max lightly chuckled before gently pushing her girlfriend's head.

When the two girls finished their breakfast, Max went in her room to

read a book while Jane went in her study to work. The redhead was cut in her book by the phone ringing. She jumped from her bed and ran to the living room to answer:

- "Hello?...Yes...Yes...You're sure? Jane Brown?...Uh, okay."

Max took the phone and went to Jane's door. She lightly knocked at it before entering.

- "It's for you," told the redhead, holding out the phone.

Jane frowned but took it to answer:

- "Yes?...Yes...Okay...Okay...Thank you."

Jane hung up and gave back the phone to Max.

- "Jane?"

- "I know, I lied," said quickly the brunette.

- "Why?"

- "Because...because she was dead for me, she completely lost her mind, with Constance we visited her many times and she couldn't recognize us! She was dead for me..."

- "Why telling me she was dead?"

- "You would have wanted to see her and...I didn't want you to see her."

- "Why?"

- "Why? Because she couldn't recognize me! It was, it was painful to see her and not being able to talk to her normally, like a daughter to her mother, she thought I was her friend! I was nothing more for her!"

- "You could have told me; I would have understood."

- "I know! I just...I couldn't..."

- "I'm not mad at you...I'm just worried. How do you feel?"

- "I feel nothing..."

Max slowly walked to Jane, stood behind her, wrapped her arms around her, and kissed the top of her head.

- "I'll let you think of it."

- "I won't cry if it's what you think, or expect. I had already grieved for years."

- "Okay. What are you gonna do?"

- "I don't know...I should go to the hospital..."

- "You want me to come?"

- "No, it's fine. You don't have to."

- "Okay. It's as you want, but if you need anything you just need to ask, okay?"

- "Yeah, okay. Thank you."

Max rubbed Jane's shoulders and kissed her cheek before leaving the room. When she closed the door, Cat appeared in the corridor. She re-opened the door to let him go inside; she thought that a bit company would be a good thing for Jane.

Jane stayed in her room until diner time. The meal was quiet, but, at least, Max knew why this time, and it wasn't because of PTSD, but because she was lost in her thoughts.

- "I'm leaving tomorrow morning, around 5," said Jane.

- "Okay."

- "I called my boss. He is okay with that."

- "It's nice from him," told Max.

- "Yeah."

- "You're sure you don't want me to come?"

- "No, no, it's fine, don't worry."

- "Okay."

The two girls finished to eat in silence, before going directly to bed. Jane was laying down on her back, looking at the ceiling, while Max was on her right side, watching her girlfriend. She knew how Jane was; when her sister died, she hugged her to cry but then, she didn't want physical contact, and she was respecting that, but she didn't like seeing like that and would like to do more. She was feeling useless.

39. The picture

The alarm clock rang at 4. The two girls opened their eyes with difficulties and stood, feeling hot by the summer night. Jane went to her bathroom to get ready while Max prepared her luggage. Jane didn't sleep at all, she could see it in her eyes, so she prepared three thermos flasks of coffee for her. Jane reappeared, biting her bottom lip on the left and fidgeting.

- "You're ready?" asked softly Max.

- "I think," answered Jane with a shaking voice.

- "If you're tired, you stop, I don't want you to take stupid risks, okay?"

- "Yeah...I don't know if it's a good idea..."

- "You want me to come?"

- "It's too late..."

Max had a small smile.

- "You really think you need all these pieces of luggage with you?" smirked the redhead.

Jane frowned.

- "I called Abigail yesterday; she will keep Cat with her while we're not here."

- "...Thank you..."

- "No problem."

Max saw relief on her girlfriend's face. She knew Jane was more hurt than she wanted to show.

Max brought the luggage in the car while Jane took care of Cat and his stuff. Once everything ready, the two girls went to Abigail's.

- "Hey girls," said the blonde girl with her voice down and her eyes half-opened.

- "Hey Abi, sorry to wake you up," told Max.

- "It's fine, no problem, I wanted to see this cute cat."

Abigail invited them to enter, enabling Jane to let go her cat. The blonde girl took the brunette in her arms.

- "I'm sorry," murmured Abigail.

- "Thank you," answered Jane.

Abigail rubbed her back, kissed her cheek, and broke the hug with a warm but sad smile on her face. The two girls said goodbye to the cat and the girl before leaving the town. Max was the first one to drive, enabling Jane to sleep a bit. The redhead spent the day before sleeping because she knew Jane would be too tired to drive. They spent half of the day in the car, stopping only to take some gas, to eat, to go to toilet, or to change the driver. When the girls arrived, they went to the hotel to put their luggage before going to the hospital where her mother had been living for years. The male nurse recognized Jane instantly and offered her his condolences. He showed them the way to her room, even if Jane knew by heart the way.

When Jane entered, she felt a pinch in her heart. Not seeing her mother in this room getting ready to spend an afternoon with her was weird. She felt emptiness inside her. She sat on the bed, staring into space, while Max was looking around. The redhead was still mad at Jane for lying to her, but she thought it wasn't the moment to reproach her this. She found a picture of a young Jane with a young Constance. They looked so happy together; they certainly gave her this picture with hope she would remember them. Max sat next to Jane, rubbed her back, and held out the picture to her.

- "Are you okay?" asked softly Max.

- "(sighs with her mouth) Yeah... (takes the picture) She certainly never noticed the picture..."

- "She was sick, you can't blame her for this."

- "I'm not. It still hurt."

- "I know...I'm sorry..."

- "Don't be. It's not your fault. And you know more than anyone how it is to live with someone sick," stated Jane, her eyes stuck on the picture.

Max nodded before looking away. She felt bad because she spent majority of her time blaming Jane for her behavior when she had a worse PTSD.

- "You kept visiting her after your sister's death?" asked the redhead.

- "Yeah...Less, but I tried to continue what we began...last time I saw her it was before Somalia, she told me I was brave and she was proud to be friend with someone like me," answered Jane with tears in her eyes. "And then she asked my name because I was already no one anymore..."

Max wrapped her arm around her shoulders and kissed her temple before placing her girlfriend's head on her shoulder. She didn't know how Jane did to face this alone those last years; Jane seemed broken by this situation.

The two girls spent the end of the day reuniting Jane's mother's stuff before going back to the hotel. Jane called all the professionals to prepare the burial. Max was on the bed when Jane reappeared and collapsed next to her.

- "So?"

- "I've a meeting tomorrow with the funeral parlor, the priest, and the attorney," told Jane.

- "Long day," pouted Max.

- "Yeah...At least, my grand-parents didn't show up yet."

The redhead had a small smile. She put her hand on Jane's head and

began to caress her, trying to relax her a bit.

- "I called everyone," said Max.

- "Everyone?" frowned Jane.

- "Yeah, Dustin, Mike, Will, and the others, to tell them."

- "Oh...Thank you."

- "No problem. You want me to come tomorrow?"

- "If it doesn't bother you, yes, I would like to. You won't be superfluous."

Max nodded. She leaned to kiss her girlfriend before putting her forehead against hers. She wanted Jane to take some rest, but the brunette got out of the bed to take care of some paperworks that the nurse gave to her. The redhead tried to support her the best she could by massaging her shoulders, hugging her, or giving her something to drink. She didn't know if it worked, but Jane didn't reject her.

- "Do you need some help?" proposed Max.

- "It's private information about my mother, you won't know what to write. It's fine, take some rest, your day was long too."

- "I won't take some rest without you. If you need anything, you just need to ask, okay?"

- "Okay. Thank you," weakly smiled Jane.

The brunette took Max's hand and didn't let it go while she was filling all the documents. It didn't take too much time for Jane to do this, like if she had been preparing this day for years.

40. Burial

The next days were very long and emotionally hard. Jane organized the entire burial with the help of Max, even if the redhead didn't do much, but, at least, she was there for her girlfriend.

Now, they were getting ready for the day. Jane was stressing a lot because she didn't want to see all her family again. They would be as awful as for her sister's burial, and she didn't need that, she was feeling bad enough. The two girls were at the funeral parlor, enabling the family to watch the body one last time. Her grandparents were there with her cousins. The two old people didn't say anything, while Jane's cousins greeted warmly the girls with heavy hearts. They weren't there for Constance's funeral, and it was regrettable; she didn't have too much problems with them, they were weird but not mean, and they seemed happy to meet Max, smiling to her despite their tears. A doctor opened the door and welcomed them inside, explaining the situation, before leaving them. Her cousins and grandparents began to walk in the hall, letting the two girls alone and behind.

- "You don't have to, you're not forced, really," told Jane with her voice down to not break the silence.

- "I know, don't worry for me," softly smiled Max.

Jane lightly nodded. She took a deep breath and was going in direction of the room, one of her cousins passed on the other way, tears falling from his eyes. Jane barely looked at him, not wanting to break down before being in the room. Her grandparents and cousins were in a moment of contemplation, sobbing in silence. Jane slowly entered to discover her mother's face one last time. Her heart became heavier than before, like if it was weighting tons. Tears came instantly in her eyes, but she didn't wanna cry, so she bit her right hand and tensed her left hand on herself.

Max saw for the first time Jane's mother in real life. She had already seen her in pictures, but it was different. She gave some space to Jane, knowing it was hard enough for her.

After half an hour, the men of the funeral home arrived to lay out the corpse in coffin. The girls separated from the others to go in their car and make a procession behind the hearse, followed by her cousins and grandparents' cars. It was Jane who was driving this time.

- "Your cousins seem nice," told Max.

- "Yeah, they can be. I hadn't seen them a lot, they weren't here for Constance's funeral, I don't know why," answered Jane.

- "Maybe your grandparents didn't tell them!"

- "I wouldn't be surprised!"

Max had a weak amused smile. Her girlfriend was so unlucky, it was a miracle she didn't give up before with a family like that, her sister really saved her life, and Max couldn't be happier about this.

The cars of the procession parked next to the hearse. The priest came to bless Jane's mother's body before coming back inside the church. The men of the funeral parlor took the coffin on their shoulders and went at the head of the procession, while the close family was behind. Once everyone ready, they all entered the church with the music and the persons already inside turning to them. Max recognized her friends, Mike, Will, James, Joyce, Dustin, Suzie, Beverly, Moussa, Lucas, Gabrielle, Troy, Juan, and Abigail. She was glad they could all come, it was an important support for Jane, even if the girl didn't look around, not wanting to see the sad faces.

Jane didn't stand during the entire ceremony. Even if she loved her mother, she still had a problem with religion. She didn't write a testimony for her mother, not because of the religion, but because she was unable to write something nice with happy memories. She found any.

She had to hear again the beginning of her mother's sickness. Jane was ten years old. Martin, her mother, and she were at the supermarket. It was a Saturday afternoon, they were buying pizzas for the diner, like they used to do. Jane was with her mother, following her, but her mother kept looking at her with a frown and tried to lose her in the market many times, until she yelled "STOP

FOLLOWING ME! I DON'T KNOW YOU!" in the middle of the shop. Jane didn't understand at first, but then, her mother hit her with her bag, and everything changed since that day.

She never told anyone about this story, she thought for years that it was because her mother didn't love her anymore and that it was her fault. She was ashamed for something she couldn't control.

Once the ceremony over, Jane joined her friends who all took her in their arms.

- "Thanks for coming," told Jane.

- "No problem, it's normal," weakly smiled Troy.

- "How are you?" asked Mike.

- "(sighs with her mouth) I'll be better tomorrow."

- "Yeah..."

Her cousins all joined her to hug her too. Everyone stayed quiet a moment, to show respect to Jane's mother's body. The hearse started and drove slowly, followed by a procession walking behind it in silence or with murmurs. They arrived at the graveyard for a last ceremony. Some people approached the hole where the coffin was to show a last proof of love before walking away. They all walked away to let the gravedigger closing the grave.

Jane's grandparents appeared behind her and asked her if they could talk to her privately. She sighed and rolled her eyes but followed them.

- "How is she?" asked Will.

- "She is devastated," pouted Max. "She didn't talk a lot, but, it's a sensitive subject, I mean, she didn't tell me about her mother, she preferred telling me she was dead than admitting she was sick. I don't think she was ready for this, even if she is kinda relieved now."

The group nodded. They all turned their heads to watch Jane; the girl seemed really angry, and the conversation was certainly not friendly.

- "Happy!? How can you think this!? How can you think I'm fucking happy to live this again!?" got angry Jane.

- "You'll have everything again and you know that! We're her parents, we should have something!" told her grandfather on the same tone.

- "I don't make the law!"

- "No, but you could have the sympathy to share what you have now!" intervened her grandmother.

- "I don't have sympathy for you, but fine! Tell me what you want! I'll see what I can do!"

- "Her apartment in Miami."

- "Well, when I put it in rental, you'll just have to pay to go in there! I take every money, even from the devil in persons!"

- "What a disgrace! You should be ashamed!"

- "But I'm not! It's all mine! Her apartment in Miami, her house in California, her bank account, and all those things! It's all mine!"

- "You stupid dyke!"

- "Oh fuck off!"

Jane got enough and preferred joining her friends than keeping talking with those two demons.

- "Is everything okay?" asked Max.

- "Yeah, just a normal conversation with my grandparents," told Jane.

The redhead rubbed her girlfriend's back and pouted to the others who had the same expression on their faces.

- "There is a meal after?" asked Dustin.

- "Um, yeah, not a big meal, just some things to drink and eat, that's all. You don't have to come, you all have lots of roads to do," said Jane.

- "You're sure?"

- "Yeah, yeah, really, don't worry about this, it's fine."

- "Well, I think we can still come, even for a few minutes, it won't delay us at all," said Mike.

The others all agreed with him. Jane nodded like to thank them. Everyone separated to join their cars, following each other to the place where the meal was happening. Mike and the others all helped Jane to install the food and the drinks on the bar, while Max and Abigail were preparing some tea and some coffee. Once everyone served, Jane's friends began to talk with her cousins, and were surprised to see they weren't against Jane, even defending her sometime. Martin, Jane's stepfather, approached Jane and murmured:

- "Can I talk to you?"

The brunette sighed with her nose and rolled her eyes but followed him a bit farther.

- "What do you want!?" asked sharply Jane.

- "It won't be long. I just want to know if you want to keep her car."

- "Her car? You don't want it?"

- "I already have two, I don't need a car, and your cousins have cars too. The car is clear, the garage looked at it and it's drivable."

- "Yeah? What about my grandparents?"

- "They have four cars and use only one, they don't need a car," told Martin.

- "Yeah, clearly not. Well, I can take it if nobody else needs it."

- "Okay, great."

The man smiled to her before walking away. Jane took a moment alone, not wanting to talk to anyone, but Max still joined her without saying a word.

- "He gave me her car," explained Jane.
- "Oh, that's nice."
- "Yeah...We already have a car."
- "Which you repaired well! We can drive it like if it was a new one!" said Max.
- "I know. But, I was thinking, we don't really need two cars, we could give it to Abigail, no?"
- "It's an amazing idea, I'm totally with you for this."

Jane had a weak smile to her. People left one by one, all joining their homes, letting the last ones cleaning everything. Jane and Max joined their hotel room, finishing this long day.

41. Sex?

Max and Jane spent the night after the funeral at the hotel. The two girls were exhausted and preferred not taking risks on the road. They stayed the morning in bed, cuddling each other while slowly waking up. Jane straightened a bit and met Max's eyes. The two girls watched each other before leaning for a kiss. The kiss became more passionate, and Jane rolled on her side to finish on Max. Jane began to be closer to Max, heating up the redhead. But Max felt something weird and preferred stopping.

- "Step back, Jane!"

- "I did something wrong!?" asked the brunette with an irritated tone.

- "Just step back!"

Max had to push her.

- "What the fuck!?" got angry Jane. "I thought you wanted it!"

- "Of course I want it! But you're not ready!"

- "Hell yeah I am!"

- "Hell no, you're not! You're fucking pale like a ghost, you have cold sweat, and you breathe too fast!"

- "I'm good!"

- "No you're not! Just look at your goddamn hands!"

Jane looked down and noticed that her hands were shaking a lot. She hid them behind her back before looking away.

- "Tell me you didn't think of them while you were kissing me or that you didn't feel any pain, and I'll believe you."

Jane clenched her jaw without looking up.

- "I know you're trying to convince yourself that you're ready, and I

tried to encourage you, but you're clearly not ready! Why do you force you to do this if it hurts you?" asked softly Max with a lack of understanding.

Jane just shrugged with a tear falling.

- "I just wanted to be okay..." told Jane with a small voice.

- "But, Jane, you need time to heal correctly, you can't force things like that, you could just make it worse!"

- "I know! But...I don't want you to leave because it's too long!"

- "To leave!? Jane, you slapped me and I'm still here!"

- "I know! I just want to be sure you would stay, I just wanted you to be satisfied!"

- "But if you have a panic attack while we're having sex I'm not satisfied! Don't ruin everything you did just for some minutes of sex!"

- "Some minutes!? Nice, I'm offended now."

- "You know what I meant," said Max.

- "Yeah...it's just, since I'm born, I lose everyone, I didn't want this to happen with you..." explained Jane.

- "If I leave you for this then I'm the worst bitch ever! Am I a bitch?"

- "Hard question, I need to think about it!" joked the brunette with a serious tone.

Max took her pillow and threw it on her girlfriend's face who lightly chuckled. The redhead grabbed her girlfriend's head and forced her to lay down again next to her.

- "We'll go slowly, okay? You just kissed me again a few weeks ago, I'm not expecting you to heal in a second, you have all your time. I know you're tired and you want this to end, and it will, I know that, but, for now, just take your time, I'm still here. And seeing you smile is satisfying me."

Jane had a small amused sigh. She was feeling ridiculous, she knew Max wasn't going to leave, but a part of her couldn't stop thinking it could happen. She never thought her mother would forget her, but it happened; she never thought all her friends would let her down when she was bullied for being lesbian, but they did; she never thought her first girlfriend would be raped and killed in front of her, but it happened; she never thought she would buried her sister, but she did; she never thought she would live what she lived in Somalia, but she did. All of this happened while she was just trying to live, but it was like if she wasn't allowed to live, just to suffer. Why Max would stay with such an unlucky girl as her!? It didn't make sense; it was too beautiful to be true! But, anyway, Max was there, it was all that mattered.

The two girls spent the rest of the day in the car, driving, before finally arriving at their home. They barely have the time to close the door that someone was already knocking at it. They frowned at each other, but Jane still opened it. A man brutally entered and blocked Jane against her wall.

- "WHAT THE FUCK!? LEAVE HER ALONE!" intervened Max, grabbing his shoulder and throwing him out of the apartment.

- "CAN I FUCKING KNOW WHY YOU OPENED A FILE ON ME!?" yelled the man to Jane.

- "You're a betrayer, I know that! What happened is all your fault!" answered the brunette.

- "You're taking risks, Jane, it can't end well!"

- "I hope it won't. Now leave before I open another file for assaulting."

- "It's not over!"

- "You threaten me now!?"

The man grumbled some inaudible things before quickly running in the stairs. Jane came back calmly inside while Max was still not understanding the situation. She followed Jane and closed the door.

- "Who the fuck was that!?" asked the redhead.

- "Daniel."
- "The guy who was with you in Somalia!?"
- "Yes."
- "He is fucking crazy! He has no right to do this!"
- "I know. He is scared."
- "Scared!? I'm the one scared right now!"
- "He knows he did something wrong, he is scared of the consequences."

Max gulped with difficulties and tried to calm her fast breathing and her shaking body; she really thought this man was going to hit her if not killing her! But Jane was calm, like if she didn't care.

The brunette took off her coat, then Max's coat, before taking her in her arms. Max wrapped her arms around her and tried to enjoy this moment. Jane had such a complicated life that she was scared something would happen to her every time she left home. And this story with the Army was making it worse.

42. Fight

When Max opened her eyes, Jane wasn't there. She grumbled, not really wanting to go back to work. She wandered in her corridor and heard someone talk in the living-room. She frowned and slowly opened the door to see Jane with Cat in her arms while she was putting her finger on his nose.

- "You don't like when I do that, right? Oh no, you don't like it at all," said the girl with a gaga voice and a small chuckle.

- "You're up early!"

Jane had a start, enabling the cat to run away.

- "I went running."

- "I see," smiled the redhead.

- "Wanna hug?"

- "Not before you take a shower."

- "Yes, before I take a shower!"

- "No, Jane, don't do that! (Jane approaches with her arms open) Stop that, now! (Jane wraps her arms around her) Jane! I hate you!" chuckled Max.

- "I smell, huh?"

- "Yeah, but you don't smell bad."

- "Really!?"

- "Yeah, I love your smell, but I don't like being all sweaty whereas I didn't run!"

- "Fair enough."

Jane broke the hug to let her girlfriend breath and kissed her, before

running after her cat in the corridor. Max playfully shook her head and went in the kitchen to prepare the breakfast. Jane came back wearing her outfit and sat in front of Max. The redhead looked at her pretty girlfriend eating her toast with a serious expression and played with her fingers. Someone knocked at the door.

- "It's open!" yelled Jane.

The person tried to open the door with no success.

- "No, it's not!"

Jane pouted to Max before standing and opening the door.

- "Sorry, I certainly closed it when I came back from running."

- "It's fine," smiled Moussa.

The black man entered and saw Max on his left.

- "Hey Max."

- "Hey Mouss' Mouss', how are you?"

- "I'm good. I heard you see Bev today, that's nice!"

- "Yeah, I finish early, we'll spend the end of the afternoon together, I can't wait!"

- "Yeah, that's great, she was excited!"

- "Yeah? I'm stressing a bit," pouted Max.

- "Don't, it will be fine," smiled Moussa.

The redhead nodded. Jane took her stuff, kissed her girlfriend, and followed Moussa outside for a new day at work. But, when they arrived, they had a bad surprise.

- "Hey Daniel, you want me to open another file about you for harassment?" told Jane with a calm tone.

- "The colonel is furious, you're in a deep shit, I tell you!"

- "I don't think he needs you to tell me this!"
- "BROWN!" yelled their lieutenant.
- "I think you'll hear it by yourself," gloated Daniel.

Jane clenched her jaw and killed him with her eyes. She tried to not fade and walked in front of him with her chin up, ready to face the consequences. She barely opened the door that she could already feel the four furious eyes on her.

- "Sit," ordered her lieutenant.
- "I would prefer st-"
- "SIT!"

Jane didn't insist. She sat on the chair without looking at the colonel on her left.

- "Do you know why you're here?" asked calmly the lieutenant.
- "I've an idea," answered Jane.
- "You stole documents without permission!" got angry the colonel.
- "I didn't steal anything."
- "Yes, you did! You broke into the secretary's computer!"
- "No, I didn't."
- "YES, YOU DID!"
- "NO! I didn't! The computer was already switched on! I just clicked on print! It's not stealing! If your secretary didn't go lunch without blocking the computer, it's not my fault! It's her fault!"
- "It doesn't give you the right to steal a document!"
- "I didn't steal it, because you still have it! I just have my own version of this document!"

- "It's still private information!"

- "Yeah! You should have a better protection then! Because, if I was able to print one document, I can't imagine how many private information can leave this "overprotected" area!"

- "ENOUGH!" intervened the lieutenant.

The man rubbed his forehead and sighed loudly with his mouth while the colonel and Jane were waiting for him to say something.

- "I take care of this," said the lieutenant.

- "She needs to be punished! Or the court will punish her!"

- "There will be consequences. You have my word."

The two men stood and nodded to each other.

- "It's unacceptable," told the colonel in direction of Jane before leaving.

The lieutenant sat again, looking at Jane.

- "You knew what I've done, you can't be mad at me."

- "I am, because they discovered it. I don't think this investigation is worth it to risk to-"

- "Worth it!? You know what happened in Somalia and you think it's not worth it!? If this asshole betrayed us, he has no right to live his fucking life peacefully while we lived Hell in this goddamn basement! You can't say things like that!" got angry Jane.

- "I don't want to create tensions with the army for something we can't prove!"

- "We can fucking prove it! It's on the tape and on his documents! If he spends his time being sure we stopped the investigation, it's because he knows I'm right!"

- "His guilt is not enough!"

- "THAT'S NOT FAIR!"

Jane slammed the door closed. Everyone was looking at her with interrogative eyes, except Daniel who was smiling too much to not be hated. She quickly walked to her desk, pushing him out of her way.

- "What's wrong, Jane? You didn't find anything to keep investigating?" mocked the blonde man.

- "Fuck off, Daniel, I'm not over, you're gonna pay for what you did!"

- "But I didn't do anything, I'm innocent."

- "Definitely not."

Daniel scoffed, shook his head before approaching her ear and murmuring:

- "Waxay doorteen wadada koowaad."

It was exactly what he was saying in the tape, but now, she could clearly hear the words. Jane saw red. She took her keyboard and broke it on his head. Daniel got dazed but still jumped on Jane to block her on the ground. The two began to punch each other without caring of the others. Moussa stood from his chair and managed to grab Jane while other policemen were grabbing Daniel.

- "YOU'RE FUCKING DEAD, JANE!" yelled the blonde man, spitting some blood, while the policemen were dragging him outside. "YOU HEAR ME!? YOU'RE DEAD! I'LL FUCKING KILL YOU!"

The policemen managed to get him out of the building while Moussa was blocking Jane against a wall with his hand. She had red bulging eyes, a heavy breathing, and some blood flowing from her bottom lip and hands. The lieutenant burst out of his office.

- "What's your goal, Brown!? Getting fired!?"

Jane didn't answer, still looking at the corridor with her angry eyes.

- "You're suspended for three weeks."

- "Three weeks!?" got angry Jane.
- "I'm sorry, maybe you want a month!?"

Jane sighed with her nose.

- "No. Three weeks is fine."
- "Good. Now, leave, I don't want to see you here."
- "I'll bring you back," told Moussa.
- "I can walk," replied coldly Jane.
- "No, it's fine, let me-"
- "I CAN WALK!"

The room became quiet. Jane killed Moussa with her eyes, but Moussa didn't fade. He didn't fade but he still nodded before letting her go; she was feeling better now, it wasn't like when she had PTSD, she could walk alone.

Max was in direction of her apartment. This morning at work was awful, but she just spent an amazing moment with Bev, it was like before, like if nothing happened. They just shared gossips at a coffee shop, but it was the best thing ever! She wished it lasted longer, but Bev had to go back to work. When Max opened her door, she had the surprise to see Jane on the couch wearing normal clothes.

- "Oh! You came back early, and you have a cut at you lip. That's not good. What happened?" frowned Max.
- "Maybe I got involved into a fight and...got suspended for three weeks..." answered Jane not daring to look at her.
- "WHAT!? Why did you fight!?"
- "Daniel was there, provoking me! But, it's fine, I got something, he just proved me it was all his fault!"
- "Jane..." sighed the redhead.

Max dropped her bag and took off her coat before sitting next to her girlfriend.

- "You don't think you should take a step back?"

- "What!? No! Not you! I'm not doing this for fun!"

- "I know-"

- "This guy betrayed us! I lived one of the worst moments of my life in there because of this asshole! Why nobody wants to understand this!?" got angry Jane.

- "I just don't want you to be in trouble!" answered Max.

- "Do I have to remind who got involved and what happened!? You don't want justice for this!?"

- "I don't want you to get killed because you look for shit with the wrong people!"

- "He is the one who looks for shit with the wrong people."

Max sighed with her nose, giving up. Since she was a cop, Jane became more and more stubborn, always wanting justice for everything! She could understand, she lived horrible things with no justice after, but it didn't mean she had to take stupid and dangerous risks. The redhead stood and went to the kitchen to put some ice in a towel before coming back in the living-room. She placed it on her girlfriend's lips. Jane showed her a paper with something written on it.

- "What is it?" frowned Max.

- "It's what he's telling on the tape, and what he told me in my ear before I broke my keyboard on his stupid head."

- "Uh...Okay...What does that mean?"

- "I don't know yet, but I'll figure it out!"

- "Just...be careful, okay?"

- "Yeah, sure."

- "I'm serious!"

- "I know! I'll be careful, don't worry," smiled Jane.

Max nodded; she hoped Jane was meaning it.

- "How was your day? You saw Bev?"

- "Oh, yeah, we had lots of fun, like the good old days," smiled Max.
"Thank you for talking to her."

- "No problem, I'm here for that too."

As Jane finished early, Max proposed a massage session. It was Jane's idea to practice those moments again, really wanting to go further and to feel better than she already was. The top of the body was fine, Max could touch everything without creating a panic attack, but the bottom was still a problem; Jane was still stressing to feel someone very close to her private part, even if this person was Max. But the redhead had hope, the previous therapies worked so well on Jane that she thought it was just a matter of time, now.

43. Translation

Jane spent her three weeks of suspension trying to translate the words Daniel murmured in her ears. She went to the library to find dictionaries about Somali, or some documents of the language, but she found nothing. She tried with Internet, but she wasn't good with it. By luck, she found in newspapers a somalin who ran away from war and was now offering some services. She called him and asked him if he could translate those words. What he told her gave her a cold shiver but a reason to keep going:

- "They chose road number one!? Are you sure!?...Okay, thank you, a lot!"

Jane brutally hung up. She was still suspended, but it was too urgent to not see her Lieutenant. She grabbed her coat and left the apartment. When she arrived at the police station, all her colleagues were looking at her with interrogative eyes, but she ignored them. Moussa tried to stop her, but she was already inside the Lieutenant's office.

- "Brown!? What does that mean!?"

- "They chose the first road! Waxay doorteen wadada koowaad means they chose the first road! That's what Daniel said in the tape!"

- "You never take a break!?"

- "Never. You can't ignore this! He can speak Somali and he told them in their own language which road we were taking! They were waiting for us!"

The Lieutenant didn't answer but looked at Jane's left. The girl turned her head and noticed the colonel in the corner.

- "I read the file you made," told the colonel.

- "Okay, and?" provoked Jane.

- "There are some good things, but Daniel is an important person in our section."

- "He is a fucking traitor, no matter his damn function!"
- "What about all his good and faithful service!?"
- "What about my good and faithful service!? Nobody gives a shit about it! There is brotherhood only when you want! He is an asshole who tried to kill all of us, but he is a good man except that! Fucking hypocrite!"
- "BROWN!" intervened the Lieutenant. "Watch your language to your superior!"
- "He is not my superior, he is like everyone else who thinks they are better than me because they're men, but, guess what? It's not true, you're just fake, thinking masculinity has to be superior than femininity, but that's not true, your balls don't give you all rights! I won't stop until I have justice, and if you have to sink with him, you'll sink with him, I don't give a fuck, am I clear!?"
- "Lieutenant, you should have a better watch on your officers," said firmly the colonel, looking deeply in Jane's eyes.
- "I am not the one who should have a better watch on my officers. If you help a traitor to get through this, then, there is nothing else to say."
- "I hope you're kidding me," scoffed the man. "Why don't you fire her like a normal superior!?"
- "(stands and takes support on his desks with both of his hands) She is under my responsibility and she is the best, I won't fire my best element, same as you who doesn't want to admit that your best element is a traitor. Have a nice day, and watch your ass."
- "You'll hear about me."
- "I hear about you every day!"

The colonel left the room, furious. The Lieutenant told Jane to sit to have a conversation with her. He told her that the investigation had minor chances to succeed, but that there were many different legal ways to find justice without saying more but implying a lot. Jane had

an idea, but it could be risky. She nodded and left the office.

- "What the fuck are you doing here!?" asked Moussa from his desk.

- "I need to talk to Bev," answered Jane, ignoring his question.

- "She is at home but tell me why you need to talk to her!?...Jane!? Hey! Come back! I asked you a question!"

Jane didn't want to talk to anyone about this, none of them wanted her to finish what she began, but she was determined, no one could stop her.

She arrived quickly at Beverly's apartment and knocked with energy. Bev, surprised, walked slowly at her door, holding her pan tight in her hands before quickly opening the door, brandishing the pan.

- "Jane!? What are you doing here!?" frowned Bev.

- "And you!?"

- "You didn't hear how you knocked!? I thought I was in trouble!"

- "Why would you be in trouble!?"

- "Daniel!"

- "Daniel!? What did he do!?" asked quickly Jane.

- "He threatened me about my report, telling me it was my fault if you were crazy now!"

- "Oh yeah!? Well, I'll be crazier then!"

- "Why?"

- "I want to do another report."

- "Okay...Why?"

- "To show everyone that he is a traitor!"

- "We're gonna have problems if we do this," told Bev.

- "We had problems because of him! You don't want him to pay for this!?" asked Jane with an angry tone.

- "Of course I want to! But, not like that..."

- "Then, how!?"

- "Nothing legal, sadly..."

- "Doing a report is legal."

- "Yeah but...he scares me, and I know he scares Max too, you should think of that before thinking of Daniel...It won't change the past. It's done, I don't wanna live this anymore. I'm tired, and you're tired too. I understand why you're doing this, but, this is not good, you'll just have more PTSD...you already kicked his ass, you can't do more."

Jane clenched her jaw and looked away while rubbing her forehead. She began to realize that, maybe, it was a bad idea which could have real bad consequences. She didn't answer and just walked away, letting a dazed Bev wondering if she was okay or not.

Jane wandered in New-York city streets, with no goal in particular. She arrived at a corner and saw a redhead sitting on a wall, reading a magazine. She had a small smile and decided to sit next to her.

- "Jane? What are you doing here?" asked Max with a wide smile.

- "I was bored," answered Jane.

- "Yeah? I thought you were translating your sentence; you didn't find anything?"

- "I did."

- "Really!? What is it?"

- "They chose the first road. It's what it means."

- "That's...great? Right?"

- "Yeah, it was," told Jane with no enthusiasm.

- "What's wrong? You spent weeks on this and now that you finally know what it means, you're like...disappointed! Are you okay?"

- "Yeah, I'm fine. I can't win this fight so...I stop."

- "For real!?"

- "Yeah...it's better like that, I don't wanna waste my time with him. He doesn't deserve it."

- "I'm so happy to hear that, you can't imagine!" stated Max with a wider smile. "Who gave you this wise state of mind?"

- "Bev. I wanted to do a report with all the proofs but, she didn't want because she wants to keep going and I can't blame her for that. So, here I am, giving up..."

- "You're disappointed, aren't you?"

- "Kinda, but it'll be okay, I prefer taking care of you than him."

Max felt her heart racing and her cheeks burning. She was so relieved to hear that, she had dreamt of those words for weeks! She wrapped her arms around Jane's right arm and placed her head on her shoulder, happy to have her girlfriend at work.

- "You don't wanna go somewhere?"

- "Go somewhere?" frowned Max.

- "Yeah, I mean, not far, just for a week-end or some days, just you and me."

- "Oh my god, yes! Where?"

- "I don't know, my mom let me an apartment in Miami and a house in California so..."

- "California! Please, I miss California, the sun, the beach, the ocean! But, if you prefer Miami-"

- "No, no, California is perfect, and like that you could surf, and I

would watch you from the beach."

- "You won't be bored?"

- "Bored? By looking at you? Never!"

- "Then, all we have to do is to find a week-end where we're both free!"

- "We will," smiled Jane.

The brunette kissed her girlfriend's temple before wrapping her arm around her. The perfect moment was shortened by Max's boss calling her back to work. The redhead sighed, kissed Jane, and went back inside. Jane kept walking in direction of her apartment. On the coffee table was a paper with the Somali words. She took it and burnt it, wanting to forget this story, even if she knew it would be hard. But now, she had to prepare her week-end with Max in California, it was all she wanted.

44. California

The girls needed two weeks before finally blocking a weekend. It was almost the beginning of autumn, but they didn't care, they just wanted to spend some time together, with no stress. They took the plane to not be too tired when they were at the house. Max discovered it for the first time. It was a beautiful house with view on the ocean, it was like a dream. When she opened the door, she saw boxes. Jane and her cousins began to reunite her mother's stuff to clean the house.

- "This place is beautiful," stated Max, ecstatic.

- "Yeah...I've no memories in there, my mom bought it just before she got sick. I didn't even know she bought a house! That's crazy!"

- "I'm sorry..."

- "I'm not, I'll have memories with you, now," smiled Jane.

- "You're cheesy, I love it."

- "I know. Come on, let me show you around the house."

The brunette grabbed her girlfriend's hand before showing her the different rooms: the kitchen, the two bathrooms, the toilets, the five bedrooms, the garage, the garden with an outside kitchen, a barbecue, and a wood oven.

- "Oh! I can cook real pizzas!" told happily Max.

- "Yeah! That's cool, right?"

- "Especially for you, you'll enjoy it!"

- "I know!"

Once everything installed, the two girls decided to take a walk on the beach. Max was like in paradise, feeling each grains of sand between her toes, the smell of the salt water, and the soft wind on her cheeks brought her back old memories; the day her father taught her how to

surf, all those castles sand she built with her ex best friend, Nate, and, less funny memories like the arriving of Neil and Billy.

The redhead turned her head to Jane. The brunette kept her shoes, not fan of sand, and was looking down while she was walking. Max kissed her cheek to bring her back.

- "You look sad," stated the redhead.

- "I'm not sad, I'm just...I don't know..."

- "It's okay, you don't have to tell me. And, you've had lots of hard emotions this year, maybe it's hard for you to switch off."

- "Yeah...maybe...but I'm glad to be here with you," reassured Jane.

- "I hope!" chuckled the redhead.

Jane had an amused sigh before wrapping her arm around her and kissing her cheek.

- "You don't wanna surf?" asked Jane, showing a beach hut proposing surf materials.

- "I can?"

- "Of course, you can! Have fun!"

- "What about you?"

- "I've my magazines, don't worry."

- "Well, if it doesn't bother you, I won't say no!"

The two girls approached the hut. Max asked for a suit and a board while Jane chose a deckchair not too far from the ocean. Once ready, Max joined Jane.

- "You look hot," told Jane.

- "I know!" joked Max.

- "You're ready?"

- "I don't know...It's been a while!"
- "Don't worry, nobody cares if you fall."
- "I care!"
- "Just have fun, it's all that matters. And, maybe it's like bike, it'll come back to your legs."
- "Says the girl who still can't ride her BMX," mocked the redhead.
- "...That's mean, I'm offended," joked Jane with a serious tone.

Max chuckled before leaning to kiss her. The redhead waved to Jane before going to the ocean. She struggled at first, but Jane was right, it came back to her legs. She was now flying on the water, controlling the waves, almost touching the sky. She risked doing some surf tricks. She fell many times but managed to try again and to success. She was feeling so powerful.

Jane was on her deckchair, admiring her girlfriend failing but keeping going. She took some pictures with the camera that Abigail lent them. She watched her doing perfectly her tricks until a big wave devoured her. The redhead grabbed her board and began to approach Jane.

- "I really loved your tricks! Especially the last one when you disappeared in the water!" told loudly Jane.

Max planted her board in the sand before answering:

- "Your mockeries don't reach me."

Jane smirked and chuckled. The redhead laid down next to Jane, on the same deckchair, before wrapping her soaked arms around her.

- "It's your revenge for my mockery?"
- "...Yes."
- "Okay, it's fine. I took pictures!" told Jane.

- "Nice, we'll have to get them developed," smiled Max.

- "Yeah, I hope I didn't fail!"

- "Jane, we're talking about you, you obviously failed!"

- "...Okay, you wanna play this, your day is gonna be long."

The two girls chuckled before kissing each other. Jane kept reading her magazine when she noticed that Max was rubbing a lot her right fingers.

- "You hurt yourself?" frowned the brunette.

- "Yeah, when I fell, I hit the board, but it's fine, it's not broken," explained the redhead.

- "You should put ice on it."

- "We don't have ice!"

Jane bent and grabbed her bag before taking off a cold spray.

- "...But we have this, apparently!"

- "I know you; I knew you would hurt yourself."

- "Well, I would usually be offended but, as you're right, I'm glad you took this!" said Max.

Jane gently grabbed her girlfriend's hands before spraying her fingers and wrapping a bandage around them. They stayed a moment under the sun, cuddling, before leaving the place to go on market to buy what they needed to prepare pizzas. Jane was so hungry that she wanted everything for every kind of pizzas!

The girlfriends cooked together, preparing the pizza bases and the ingredients. They made four pizzas, and Jane almost ate all of them; Max couldn't believe it!

Then, they spent the afternoon visiting the cities around before going back to the house for a peaceful night on the patio, watching the

ocean and the stars. Max put her head on Jane's shoulder and took her hand but realized she was a bit shaking.

- "Are you okay?" asked Max with a concerned tone.
- "Yes, yes, of course, why?" answered Jane, a bit embarrassed.
- "You're shaking, what's wrong?"
- "Nothing, just...stupid ideas..."
- "You wanna try again?"
- "No, no, it's fine, I don't wanna ruin this weekend."
- "You won't ruin anything, you're putting too much pressure on your shoulders for something that shouldn't be stressful," told softly Max.
- "I know, I know, it's just...my body seems ready but I'm not sure for my mind."
- "Look, we already went far last time-"
- "But, you didn't (looks around) have an orgasm," said Jane, whispering the last words.
- "Why are you murmuring?" murmured Max. "It's not bad words, you know."
- "I know, I just don't like saying that out loud."
- "Okay," chuckled the redhead. "And, yes, I had an orgasm, I even had multiple orgasms, and I'm pretty sure I had one when you kissed me after you were on this mine."
- "I'm not that good."
- "If I say so."

Jane nodded before looking away, still shaking.

- "What scares you?" insisted gently the redhead.

- "Nothing, it's...ridiculous..."

- "If it blocks you, it's not ridiculous. You're scared to not have an orgasm?"

Jane shook her head to say no.

- "To have an orgasm?"

Jane had a little start before taking back her shaking hand and looking away. But Max didn't want her to close on herself again. She put her hands on Jane's cheeks and forced her to look at her.

- "It's okay, Jane, relax, I'm not judging, I just wanna understand, that's all!"

- "But, how could you understand something that I don't understand myself! It doesn't make sense! I didn't like it! I fucking hate it!"

- "I know, I know. Look, Gabrielle told me it happened most of the time; your body reacts even if you're suffering, she told me it's a protection to feel less pain," explained Max.

- "That's what my therapist said..."

- "Then, you just need time to accept it."

- "I am, it's just...she told me I would certainly feel pain and fear when I have...you know."

- "Yeah, the bad word!" lightly mocked Max.

- "Yeah," lightly chuckled Jane. "I'm sorry, I didn't wanna ruin our weekend..."

- "Ruin? You didn't ruin anything! I'm glad you feel safe enough to tell me how you feel! I prefer this than seeing you being bad without knowing why! And I'm sure you feel kinda relieved now."

- "Yeah, kinda."

- "And like that, I can take this information in consideration, if I see

you stressing, I'll know why and I'll be careful, okay?"

Jane nodded.

- "Now, if you wanna try, I'm okay with it, but if you don't think you're ready, we don't, I'm fine with both options."

- "Yeah? I guess we could...try?"

- "I think that too," smirked Max.

The redhead stood and invited Jane to follow her by grabbing her hand.

After their private moment, the two girls were laying down in their bed, breathing heavily, and sweating. Jane was on her right side, looking at the wall while thinking. Max rolled on her side and wrapped her arms around her girlfriend before telling:

- "I'm sorry for giving you an orgasm."

- "It's okay," answered Jane, still a bit shaking. "It has to happen and, it was less painful than I thought."

- "Yeah? You wanna talk about it?"

Jane rolled on her back to watch Max.

- "No, I'm good, I knew it would happen. It'll be better next time."

- "Yeah, I'm sure of that," smiled the redhead.

Max leaned to kiss Jane. The brunette snuggled against Max who wrapped her arms around her, before both falling asleep, feeling glad to have each other.

45. Hard day

The two girls came back exhausted from their weekend. They collapsed on their couch, decided to not move anymore, but, apparently, someone didn't want them to take a break. They heard knocks at the door, sighed, and then, Max stood to open it. Abigail quickly entered, with Cat and his stuff in her arms, but, more importantly, the newspaper. She put the cat's stuff on the ground before showing the paper to Jane. The brunette frowned and looked where Abigail was showing. It was a small article, not important for the readers, except some...

- "No way!" exclaimed Jane with her eyes wide opened.

- "What?" frowned Max.

- "He is struck off!"

- "What? Who?"

- "Daniel! He can't be a military anymore!"

- "What!?"

Max quickly sat next to Jane before reading the newspapers. Apparently, someone sent all the proofs to the chief of the Army who decided to take charge of his case by definitely firing him from the Army.

- "It's good news, right?" asked Max.

- "Um, yeah! It's kinda justice!" answered Jane. "He won't betray anyone again! I just wonder who sent the evidence."

- "Certainly someone close to you, it's not like if you showed everyone what you found!"

- "Yeah, I just hope I won't have problems, because it's definitely not me!"

- "They know it's not you," intervened Abigail. "Moussa told me that,

if it was you, everybody would know, but this, it was anonymous, you're not the kind to stay anonymous."

- "Okay, that's great then!" smiled the brunette.

Max saw nothing great in this; if Daniel thought it was Jane, he could try to get revenge and assault her. Jane noticed her girlfriend's worry and lost her smile. She put the newspaper on the coffee table and wrapped her arm around her with a reassuring smile. Max had a weak smile and put her head on her shoulder, not wanting to talk about it. Abigail didn't want to bother them more, so she took the newspapers and left the apartment.

- "It's over, relax," said softly Jane.

- "For you, yes, but him!? You don't know what he has in his mind! He could come back!"

- "He won't, he moved to Seattle, it was written in the article."

- "You're sure?"

- "More than sure, it was written at the end. If you have doubts, you can ask Abigail to bring it back, it's fine."

- "Yeah, I believe you," told Max.

- "I know, you'll still check it, to be really sure."

- "...Maybe."

The two girls had small chuckles. They stood and brought their luggage to their room to unpack them. They were so tired that they didn't have the force to unpack everything, preferring taking showers and laying down in bed, doing nothing.

- "It was an amazing weekend," stated Max.

- "Yeah? You liked it?" mumbled Jane, her face in her pillow.

- "If I liked it!? Jane! I loved it! I wish we could go more often in weekend like that!"

- "Cool, I'm glad you had a good time."

- "I always have good times with you."

- "That's cheesy, I love it."

- "I know."

Max got her face closer to Jane's, touching each other's noses. The redhead grabbed Jane's arm and placed it on her belly to caress it. Jane closed her eyes and didn't need a lot of time to fall asleep. Max felt her eyelids getting heavier and heavier, and decided to not fight against her tiredness.

The alarm clock ringing hit the two girls' brain. They both opened one eye, looking around. Max turned off the clock before looking at Jane and dropping her head on her pillow. Jane found some energy and sat on the bed.

- "Come on Max, you're gonna fall asleep again if you stay in bed."

- "Just a few minutes."

- "I'll take my shower; I'll wake you up after if you want."

- "kay."

Jane got out slowly of her bed, closing her eyes sometimes, but still moving. She shuffled in her corridor and felt something rubbing her legs.

- "Hey Cat," said the girl with her voice down. "You're hungry? Let me feed you."

She took the small animal in her arms and went to the kitchen to put some food in his bowl before going in her bathroom to take her shower and getting ready. Now wearing her outfit, Jane came back to her room, Max still asleep. She sat on the edge of the bed, moved Max's hair behind her ear, and leaned to kiss her cheek. The redhead felt a pleasant heat in her stomach and couldn't hold her smile. She slowly opened her eyes and put her hand on Jane's thigh to caress it.

- "I don't know how you do to wake up this early," said Max.
- "I don't have the choice. I'll get the photos developed today, we could watch my beautiful work tonight, what do you think?"
- "I can't wait to see them, but I finish late today, it's a long day."
- "I know, I can wait," smiled Jane.

Max had a small smile.

- "Moussa is late today?" frowned the redhead.
- "No, he is not supposed to pick me up."
- "Then, why you don't go?"
- "I wanna be sure you won't fall asleep again."
- "I won't, you can leave with no worries."
- "Okay."

Jane kissed her girlfriend before standing and leaving the apartment. Max sighed with her mouth, exhausted, but still got out of the bed to get ready and went to work. When she arrived, their Chef told them that there was a food critic today and that he wanted them to be at the best of their best, as usual. Even if they were all good, it was still a little pressure to cook for a food critic, one bad word and they could kill the restaurant. It was rush hour, and one of the waiters recognized the food critic. Every cook's heart stopped, feeling stress growing. Max wasn't the kind to panic about her work, but as she was tired, she thought that she could fail without noticing it. She burnt her arm two times and cut her fingers five times, but, at least, her food was good. She didn't know why she hurt herself so much, certainly a bad day.

The rush hour was over, but the day was still long. She took ten minutes of break to take care of her burns but had to go back to work, even if she had bandages around her fingers. It wasn't very hygienic, she wondered why her Chef didn't yell at her and ask her to leave! So, she stayed and participated at the rush hour of the night.

She didn't hurt herself this time, but one of the cooks got sick and had to go back to his home, meaning they all had double charges of work. She was shaking so many pans that she couldn't feel her hands anymore! And being on her feet all day long was beginning to be felt in her legs. The night finally ended, but Max had to clean the kitchen, like if no one wanted her to rest. She tried to be fast, wanting to go back home and see Jane who was certainly waiting for her. She was almost done when she heard someone enter the kitchen.

- "Lisa!? What do you want!?" snapped Max.

- "Nothing special," smirked the girl.

- "Why are you still here then!?"

The brown-haired girl slowly approached Max before blocking her against her kitchen counter.

- "What the fuck!? Back off!" replied the redhead, brutally pushing her.

- "Come on! I know you want it! Your girlfriend won't last like that forever! After a story like that it's just platonic between you and her!"

- "Well, I'm sorry to break your dreams but it's not just platonic! We're good now, I love her, and she loves me! Now, leave me alone! Live your life and let us live our lives! I don't fucking love you!"

But Lisa didn't seem happy to hear that. She turned her feet and threw the cleaned pan on the floor, forcing Max to stay more. The redhead didn't answer, not wanting to play her game, but she was boiling inside. This day was never ending! She needed one more hour to clean everything before finally going back home.

When she opened her door, the living-room was empty; Jane was certainly in their room. She arrived in the corridor and saw lights coming from the last left door. Jane was on the bed, her back against the wall, her right arm used as a pillow behind her head, and her left hand on her belly, holding a magazine. The redhead didn't want to wake her up and preferred taking her shower before joining her. She slid in the bed at Jane's right, put her head on her chest, and

wrapped her arms around her for a tight hug. She got surprised to see a hand on her arm.

- "Long day?" asked Jane with a tired voice.

Max just nodded. She was so tired that she could cry for nothing.

- "You developed the photos?" told the redhead with wet eyes.

- "Yeah. Wanna watch them?"

Max nodded. Jane stretched her arm to the nightstand and took the pictures. She didn't fail this much pictures in fact, they were even beautiful sometimes! Max was positively surprised. They especially loved the last one, where they're both on it, the picture was looking good. Jane put them back on the nightstand, lighted off the lamp, before tightening the hug and kissing Max's forehead. The redhead let go some tears of tiredness but was glad to have Jane to comfort her after this hard day. She could fall asleep with no worries.

46. Dinner

Max organized a dinner with her mother at their apartment. She wanted her to see Jane how she really was, not like the one she met months ago. She was stressing; even if Jane was feeling better, the brunette was still a bit mad at her mother for abandoning her when she needed her, and she was fearing some curt ripostes. Max was finalizing the meal while Jane was placing the plates on the table.

- "Look, I know you still think she abandoned me, but, she was under Neil's influence, it was complicated, she wasn't really herself, okay?"

- "Yeah, I know. She still abandoned you."

- "Just be polite, that's all I'm asking, and I want her to see how perfect you are," smiled Max.

- "That's true, I'm perfect," joked Jane with a serious tone.

- "Yeah, so, keep being perfect and be kind with her, okay?"

- "I'll try."

Max smiled and kissed her girlfriend. The second after, they heard knocks at the door. Max went to it to open it.

- "Hey mom!" smiled the redhead.

- "Hey Max!"

The mother entered and took her daughter in her arms. Max wasn't very fan of hugs, but, as it was her mother and as their relation was pacified, she was okay with that. But Jane wasn't ready to have a hug too! She looked at Max with wide opened eyes while the redhead was trying to not laugh too loud. The mother broke the hug and put her hands on Jane's cheeks before saying with a smile:

- "I'm happy to finally meet you."

Jane was so surprised by this reaction that she just nodded, not really knowing what to say.

- "Come on, I'll show you the apartment," intervened Max.

The mother let go Jane before beginning to walk in the corridor. Max was going to follow but stopped to murmured at Jane:

- "Can you set the table on the balcony for the aperitif?"

- "Um, yeah, of course," mumbled Jane.

- "You're okay?"

- "Yeah, yeah, it's just...don't worry, I won't say anything to her, she looks so happy to be here, I don't wanna break this."

- "You're amazing."

Jane kissed her girlfriend before going on the balcony to set the table. Max joined her mother and showed her the two bathrooms to finish with the bedrooms. She opened Jane's ex bedroom -and now, study- and was proud to show it this time, it was all tidied and cleaned. Then the two girls' bedroom, which she was proud of too, because they were finally sleeping together, it was their real bedroom. And, finally, Abigail's ex bedroom.

- "This is where you sleep tonight, is it fine?"

- "It's perfect, thank you," smiled the mother.

The woman entered and put her luggage on the bed and looked around with a happy and proud smile.

- "I'm glad you didn't make the same mistakes as me."

- "I made mistakes too," told Max, not really knowing what to say.

- "But you made it, you're succeeding in everything you do! You're an amazing cook in a good restaurant, you have a nice girlfriend who has stars in her eyes when she looks at you and who was ready to fight herself because you were strong enough to make her realize she was important, and you have such a beautiful and cozy apartment! A mother can't dream better for her daughter!"

- "Mom, you're gonna make me cry," chuckled the redhead, wiping her eyes.

- "I'm sorry, I'm just so proud of you, you really seem happy, finally."

- "I am."

The mother couldn't resist to another hug, which amused the redhead. They both broke the hug before joining Jane in the living-room. The brunette wrapped her arm around Max's shoulder and kissed her temple:

- "Are you okay?" murmured Jane who noticed her wet eyes.

- "Yeah, I'm fine," sniffed Max.

Max rubbed her girlfriend's belly before joining her mother in the kitchen.

- "It smells really good, I can't wait to taste what you cooked," said the mother. "And Jane seems to be a big fan of your food!"

Max and her mother had a small chuckle while Jane was frowning.

- "You were skinnier when she saw you last time," explained Max.

- "Oh, uh, yeeeah, maybe," answered Jane, scratching the back of her head.

- "It's fine, you look better like that."

- "Oh, uh...thanks."

Max gave two taps on Jane's belly. She loved Jane's new shape, with food and sport, she found again her sexy body with good shapes where she liked. Jane served her girlfriend and her mother-in-law before taking a drink and accompanying them on the balcony where they could enjoy the view.

- "It must be quiet in here!" stated Susan.

- "Yeah, it is," answered Max.

- "How is the neighborhood? They never complained when you made noise? I mean, with your PTSD you certainly yelled a lot!"

- "Mom! It's not very gentle, don't ask things like that!"

- "It's fine," intervened Jane. "And, no, they never complained."

- "In fact, they did, to me, too scared of you. They always complained about our fights and all...but, when I told them why, they stopped, understanding..." explained the redhead.

- "Oh..."

- "Yeah, but now, they asked me if you're dead, because they haven't hear you for a while!"

Jane had an amused smile. She had a dirty joke, but she preferred keeping it for herself for now. Max understood what her girlfriend had in her mind and playfully shook her head.

As the weather was warm, Max thought it would be better to eat on the balcony, so Jane moved the plates with Susan while Max brought the food on the table.

- "I cooked simple," told the redhead.

- "It's gonna be good," said Jane.

- "I know!"

Jane playfully rolled her eyes before holding out the plates for spaghetti Bolognese. Jane devoured it while Susan kept complimenting Max for her successful life, warming the redhead's heart and making smile the brunette. Jane was so happy for Max to reconnect with her mother again; it hurt her so much when she left her house, thinking it was definitively over with her.

The dinner was finally over, enabling the two girls to lay down together in their bed while Max's mother was sleeping in the room next to them.

- "Thank you," smiled Max.

- "For?"

- "For being you, I spent an amazing night."

- "Yeah, it was fun."

- "She likes you."

- "I'm hard to hate," joked Jane.

- "True. Except our neighbors, you know, those neighbors who you would prefer them complaining about other kind of noises," smirked the redhead.

- "Weird sentence!"

- "I couldn't find something English, it's too late for this."

Jane chuckled before leaning to her for a kiss. Max placed her hands on Jane's cheeks to keep her a bit longer in this kiss and to have this warm feeling in her stomach longer too.

- "Goodnight," smiled Max.

- "Goodnight."

Max put her head on Jane's neck, wrapping her arms around her waist, slowly falling asleep with her lover.

47. Funny family

The next day, none of the two girls were working, but they both woke up early to eat breakfast with Max's mother. Jane was half asleep on the table while Max and Susan were preparing toast and coffee.

- "She never helps you?" frowned the mother.

- "What? She always helps me! But, I prefer working in the kitchen alone, she is really bad at cooking."

- "Really!?"

- "Yeah, one time we made a cake, and all she had to do was to put it in the oven and to wait. The oven burnt, like with flames and all!" told Max.

- "Oh wow! I wasn't expecting that!" chuckled Susan. "But, she could, at least, help you by putting everything on the table, preparing coffee and all."

- "Mom, Jane is not Neil! She helped me yesterday! It's her who set the table outside while I was showing you the apartment. Just because she is sleeping on the table now doesn't mean she always look at me working for her. We're good, she is fine. When we went in weekend together, I hurt my fingers, and she took care of me, it's not a one-way care, don't worry."

- "I know, I know, I just want to be sure you're not doing the same mistake as me, that's all..."

- "I know, and I appreciate, but you have nothing to worry about Jane, she is just tired because she worked a lot those last days, that's all. She is not lazy, just tired."

The mother nodded before sitting at the table. Max brought a cup of coffee to Jane, before rubbing her back to wake her up. Jane slowly straightened, smiling to her girlfriend.

- "So, Jane, do you love my daughter?" asked Susan.

- "What?" exclaimed Jane.
- "Mom, what are you doing?" frowned Max.
- "Of course I love her!"
- "I just wanted to be sure, because I heard you were not always nice with her, I mean, you slapped her!"
- "Mom! Stop that!"
- "I...I didn't want to..."
- "But you still did it, how can I be sure you won't do worse?"
- "I won't! I, I, I never wanted to hurt her, I didn't want to, I didn't control it!"
- "You often lose control like this? And why don't you trust her?"
- "What!? I do trust her!"
- "Why did you lie to her about your mother!?"
- "I, I, I don't know! I didn't want her to know, it was my pain, she didn't have to live that too!"
- "What tell me you didn't lie about other things? Like, when you work late, maybe you're with another girl?"
- "No! I would never do that!"
- "Then why lying about your mother? You don't think she had the right to know?"
- "Yeah, maybe!"
- "Why didn't you tell her!?"
- "I...because..."
- "Why, Jane!? Why!?"

- "BECAUSE SHE FUCKING KILLED MY SISTER!"

Susan stopped talking. Max frowned and looked at Jane who had her face red of anger and her hands tensed.

- "I'm sorry," told sharply Jane before standing and going in the corridor.

Max crossed her arms before leaning against her chair and looking at her mother with angry eyes.

- "Don't look at me like that," said Susan.

- "Why did you do that!? She has enough problems like that! Her family is a sensitive subject!"

- "Everything is sensitive with her, if you don't put some pressure on her, she will never talk."

- "She doesn't need pressure; she just needs time! She talks to me when she feels bad!"

- "Oh yeah? Why did she lie to you about her mother if she "talks" to you!?"

- "She told you, you want her to yell at you again!?"

- "I wanna be sure she doesn't have a secret life."

- "She doesn't, mom, I trust her, she is not Neil! Just because he was an asshole doesn't mean everyone is, Jane is far from being an asshole, and I won't tolerate you treating her like that again, she was there when you were not!"

Susan looked down, feeling hurt by those words. Max should have felt sorry for her, but she wasn't; she didn't have to provoke Jane like that, she did nothing wrong! She didn't understand what meant Jane by saying that her mother killed her sister, but she hoped it wasn't true. Max saw her mother out before joining Jane in her study. The brunette was sitting on her bed, focusing on her breathing to calm herself. Max sat next to her before lightly rubbing her back.

- "Are you okay?" asked softly the redhead.

Jane clenched her jaw but nodded.

- "This man assaulted me while I was working, and she dared comparing me to him!? This is unfair! I know I'm part of the people who hurt you, but I don't want to be compared to that asshole!" got angry Jane.

- "You're not like him, and you're not part of the people who hurt me."

- "I slapped you, and I was awful with you, I know that!"

- "Maybe you were, but not anymore. Jane, I'm not scared of you, I know you never wanted to slap me, I saw it on your face, you were feeling so bad after the slap, I know you didn't want to do it, stop blaming yourself for this, please."

Max felt a pinch in her heart when she saw a tear fall on Jane's cheek. She didn't want her to feel guilty for what happened, it wasn't really her fault, she was sick, and Max didn't want her to blame herself for being sick. And she didn't know why her mother had to say such horrible things about her, Jane had never been mean to her. She even made an effort the day before because she wanted to give her a chance!

- "I'm sorry for what my mom told you..."

- "She is still traumatized by him," said Jane, wiping her tear.

- "I know...Can I ask you something?"

- "I know what you're gonna ask. No, she didn't directly kill her, but it's still her fault."

- "Why?"

- "Because...because, I was in Seattle, doing tests for entering the police academy, so...Constance had some free time, so she made a detour because we were not far from the hospital...she never reached the hospital...I still see me, leaving the building and looking for her

car on the parking lot, but, instead, it's a policeman waiting for me to tell me..."

- "I know, I know," cut Max.

- "I know it's not my mom's fault, but, if she was dead instead of being sick, Constance would still be here..."

- "I'm sorry...I didn't know..."

- "Yeah, because I fucking lied to you!"

- "Jane..."

- "I should have told you, it was stupid, you're certainly mad at me for this!" stated Jane.

- "Well, I was, but it's done, and I don't wanna be mad at you for being too hurt to talk to me. Now, I know."

- "Yeah...I don't really like your mother."

- "I know," chuckled Max.

Jane placed her head on Max's shoulder before wrapping her arms around her and falling on her, forcing her to lay down. The redhead chuckled and wrapped her arms around her too.

- "I don't have a funny family," told Jane.

- "You've seen mine!? We're not lucky on this point!" stated the redhead.

- "Mmmh, you're my funny family."

Max's smile grew instantly with the red on her cheek.

- "You're my funny family too."

Cat jumped on the bed, surprising the two girls.

- "Oh, Cat, you're our funny family too!" joked Jane.

She grabbed the cat and rubbed his back before hugging him. Max chuckled, glad to see that her mother didn't break her sense of humor and her happiness. She didn't know if she would see her mother again, but, at least, she was sure to have Jane with her, maybe she didn't need more.

48. Central Park

Jane, Lucas, and Beverly were working today, so Moussa, Max, and Gabrielle decided to spend the day together. Max took her car and picked her two friends up, looking for a place to stop.

- "I'm glad we can see each other without worrying about them anymore!" stated Gabrielle.

- "Yeah, our babies grew up so fast!" joked Moussa.

- "Definitely!"

They were finally finding a place to park when the radio announced the next song which was going to be played, the controversial song of Nirvana. The three had the same reflex and jumped on the radio to turn it off.

- "Fucking song," told Max.

- "Yeah. Let's forget about it," said Gabrielle.

- "You're right, let's have fun," smiled Moussa.

Max finished to park her car. They got out of it and began to walk in Central Park between the trees and far from the city. They found a nice place to sit on the grass, under a tree, facing the water.

- "Did they receive this paper too?" asked Gabrielle, showing them.

- "Oh, yeah, Jane got one, she doesn't wanna go."

- "Really!? Who would refuse a medal of honor!"

- "Well, Jane! Bev doesn't have one?"

- "No, she is just a reporter," sighed Moussa.

- "She deserves one too," stated Gabrielle.

- "Yeah, I can't disagree with that, but she is not a military so..."

- "Well, they don't need a medal to be our heroes, even if they hate being called like that!"

- "They don't hate, they reject totally the idea of being heroes!" added Max. "But, I think it could be good for them to go at this ceremony, to see what people think about this, I don't know..."

- "We'll see, we've one week to convince them," said the black-haired girl.

- "Yeah, I'm curious to see Jane wearing her military outfit, I never saw her in it."

- "Really? I saw Lucas wear his many times!"

- "Yeah, but Lucas wanted to be a military, Jane did it to have a job so, she didn't wear it at home."

- "They look sexy in uniform," smirked Gabrielle.

- "Yeah, definitely, Jane is so sexy when she is wearing her cop uniform," smiled Max.

- "And me? I don't look sexy in my uniform?" asked Moussa.

- "Well, you know, I date a girl so I can't tell!"

- "Coward. Bev thinks I'm sexy!"

- "Bev is blinded by love," joked the black-haired girl.

- "I hate you both, I knew it was a bad idea to spend the day with you!"

The two girls laughed while Moussa was playfully shaking his head and chuckling.

- "How is Jane?" asked Gabrielle.

- "She is fine, my mom had been hard with her last time, but she didn't take too much importance of this, so it's fine," answered Max.

- "Yeah? What happened?"

- "Oh, well, my mom reproached her for not telling me about her mother...I shouldn't have told her that I was mad at her for not telling me, she just tried to show me she was on my side now, but attacking Jane is not the good way to show it."

- "You called her since this?" asked Moussa.

- "No, maybe later. And you? Bev and Lucas? How are they?"

- "Bev is working on a new report where she is the leader, it's gonna be cool."

- "Oh nice! What's the subject?"

- "She didn't tell me; I don't think she is allowed to tell anyone."

- "Professional confidentiality," smiled Gabrielle.

- "I guess! And Lucas?"

- "Well, he seems happy to work at this garage, he made new friends, and his leg is not a problem so, nothing to complain about!"

- "Nice, I'm glad he found a job where his leg is not a problem, it's important for his mental health."

- "Yeah, totally."

The three friends stayed a moment under this tree, sharing their lives and enjoying a moment of break. The night had slowly growing so they decided it was time to go home and joined their partners.

When Max arrived home, Jane wasn't there yet. It was still early; she wasn't really surprised. So, she decided to call her mother.

- "Hey mom."

- "Oh, hey Max, how are you?" asked the mother with a surprised but relieved tone.

- "I'm fine, and you?"

- "Good, I'm good too. I'm happy you called; I was scared you would

hate me for last time..."

- "Well, I kinda hate you for what you said, Jane did nothing wrong, she didn't deserve to hear those things."

- "I know, I know, I'm sorry, I just wanted to be sure she was okay."

- "I told you many times she was more than okay!"

- "I know, but, I convinced me that Neil was more than okay, I thought that maybe you did the same...But now, I'm sure you didn't, she seems to be a really nice girl."

- "She is. I don't want to sever all contacts again, but, if you talk to Jane like that again, I won't give you another chance."

- "I won't, you have my word!"

- "Okay, good."

Now that things were clear, the mother and the daughter could talk about something else. Max was glad that her mother didn't provoke Jane because she was a girl, but because she wanted to be sure she wasn't a Neil. Even if it was clumsy, Max understood it was because she was being a mother. She was still talking to her when Jane entered the apartment, her left arm on her belly and a tensed face.

- "I've to go, I'll call you back. (hangs up the phone and stands from the couch) Are you okay!? What happened!?" asked Max with a worried tone.

- "Nothing, I just got shot," answered painfully Jane.

- "Nothing I just got shot!? Jane! This is not nothing!"

- "I was wearing my bulletproof vest, but I have a massive bruise on my ribs!"

- "Take off your shirt, I'll put some ice."

Max went in the kitchen and put some ice in a dish towel before coming in the living-room. Jane was sitting on the couch, struggling

with her tee-shirt.

- "You can't move your arm?" frowned Max.

- "With difficulties."

- "Wait, let me help you."

Max sat next to Jane and grabbed the tee-shirt, trying to take it off without hurting Jane. When she did it, she saw the big purple bruise on her ribs.

- "Shit! You can be hurt!"

- "Yeah? Thank you for allowing me!"

- "Don't mock me, you're not in a favorable position."

The redhead gently put the ice on the purple bruise, trying to not panic.

- "Your ribs are not broken?"

- "No. (grabs Max's hand) You're shaking! What's wrong?" frowned Jane.

- "Someone shot you and you ask me what's wrong!?"

- "But, I'm fine, I mean, it's not the first time!"

- "I don't wanna know that."

- "I, I didn't wanna scare you, I saw a doctor, he told me I was fine, I just need some rest, that's all," tried to reassure Jane.

- "I know, I know, I'm just scared that, one day, you won't come back home at all..."

- "Oh...You think that every day?"

- "I try not to, but when you come back like that, I've all those thoughts which came back and it's hard!"

- "I'm sorry..."

Jane took the ice with her right hand and wrapped her left arm around Max to hug her. She didn't know Max was stressing a lot because of her job, and she didn't want her to worry all day because of this. But she could do anything about it, she loved too much her job. But she loved Max too. Maybe she should make a choice.

49. Job

Moussa and Jane were back in patrol together. The black man noticed that Jane was preoccupied since this morning, but he didn't know if he should ask or not, not wanting to touch a sensitive subject. Instead, he tried to tell her some jokes or stupid stories, but the girl wasn't very receptive.

- "Okay, what's wrong?" asked Moussa.

- "What? Nothing," frowned Jane.

- "Every time you answer "nothing", there is something wrong. What is it?"

- "Nothing, really...I'm just...thinking."

- "And what are you thinking about?"

- "It's just, when I got shot two days ago, Max told me she was scared every time I was going to work, and, I don't know, maybe I should find another work..."

- "What!? You wanna abandon me!?"

- "No! Of course not! I just, I don't want her to be worried all day because my work can be dangerous! She had suffered enough because of me," explained the brunette.

- "Well, it's your choice!"

- "You won't try to convince me otherwise!?"

- "I'm not in your mind, I can't make this choice for you, but, be sure it's the right choice."

- "I didn't say I was going to resign today! I'm just...thinking."

Moussa didn't answer. He didn't want her to give up her job like that, not after everything they lived together. It wasn't just because he would miss her, but because they both struggled to be where they

were now, especially Jane who had to go in Somalia to have this job. It wasn't a good idea, and he was sure Max would agree with him.

But Jane had another opinion about this. Max was stressing a lot with her own job, Jane didn't want her to stress more, it could kill her. And Jane already went in Somalia, knowing Max was against this idea, maybe it was time to listen to her, it was the least she could do after all.

- "Talk to her," said Moussa.

- "What?"

- "Max, talk to her. Don't resign without talking to her."

- "Uuuh, okay."

Someone calling on the radio cut them in their conversation. Someone heard gunshots coming from their neighbors' house. Sirens on, the car drove through the heavy traffic as fast as possible to reach their goal. Both jumped from the car, Jane going on the right and Moussa on the left. The black man saw a young girl -around five years old- running in the garden while crying.

- "Hey baby girl, I'm the Police, don't worry, I'm here to help."

Moussa knelt and opened his arms to take her while someone was shooting inside. The second after, a young boy -barely older than the girl- was running to him yelling:

- "My dad wants to kill my mom! My dad wants to kill my mom!"

- "It's okay, you're okay now," told Moussa, trying to stay calm. "Is there someone else in the house?"

- "My mom and my dad," answered the young boy.

- "Okay."

The black man took the young boy in his arms with his sister and ran away from the house to put them in his car. A beige car brutally stopped next to him and an old man jumped from it.

- "Where are you taking my grand-children!?"

- "Sir, is this your house?"

- "Yes!"

- "Don't stay here, someone is shooting inside," told Moussa, taking the man by his arm and bringing him away.

- "What!? My daughter is inside!"

- "I know, I know, my colleague is inside, and some backup are on their way, stay with your grand-children."

The man nodded and took his grandchildren in his car before going away. Moussa took his gun in his hands and slowly approached the house. He could hear Jane talk with the suspect, trying to calm him down. Apparently, he was using his wife as a hostage and was threatening her with his gun. He slowly opened the door, not wanting to scare the suspect, and saw that he and Jane were both putting their guns down. He let go his wife on the ground and Jane handcuffed him. Moussa entered and went to the woman who was bleeding from her entire face and her shoulder.

- "I called an ambulance," told Moussa.

- "Good," answered Jane.

Backup just arrived, so Jane could take the suspect outside. An old man approached her with a worried expression.

- "How is my daughter!?"

- "She is fine," answered Jane.

The man didn't wait more and ran inside.

- "Not bad for a girl," muttered Jane.

Moussa and Jane spent the end of the day working on this case and filling files. They were exhausted and were dreaming of a comfy bed. At almost 11pm, the two were finally able to leave the police station.

When Jane opened her apartment door, she could hear Max cook in the kitchen. She immediately smiled, took off her coat, and joined her by wrapping her arms around her.

- "Hey you, how was your day?" asked Max with a smile too.

- "Good, and you?"

- "Long and tiring, but it wasn't that bad."

The redhead kept stirring in her sauce while Jane placed her head on her girlfriend's shoulder and had a tired sigh with her nose.

- "I don't wanna quit my job," said the brunette.

- "I hope you don't! Why would you?" frowned Max.

- "I don't want you to be worried."

Max turned off the gas and turned to Jane.

- "I don't want you to quit your job for me! That's not what I meant when I told you I was scared for you. Even when you go running alone in the morning I'm scared for you, but I don't want you to stop doing what you love because I'm too...worried, I mean, it's like that, I can't change this, and I don't want you to change your life because of this!" explained the redhead.

- "Oh...okay...I thought you wanted me to stop, and I was ready to do it for you."

- "I don't want you to stop! You struggled so much to be where you are now, it would be unfair to ask you to stop. And you would hate me for this, I don't want that. And you're not ready to stop, that's why you told me you didn't want to, you love too much your job, I know that, don't worry for me."

- "Yeah, okay...Today's mission convinced me to not quit."

- "Yeah? What was it?" smiled Max, turning again to her sauce.

- "Well, there was this man shooting at his family and, Moussa took

the kids with him while I entered the house. He was pointing his gun to his wife, then me, and then he grabbed his wife and pointed the gun at her head, ready to shoot!"

- "Oh my god! What did you do!?"

- "I talked to him, you know, the basics, telling him it would be okay, I understand what he was living, and all those things, so he put down his gun, and nobody died," explained Jane, a bit proud of herself.

- "God, I don't know how you can stay calm in a situation like this!"

- "I'm paid for this."

- "Yeah, a point for you!"

- "And, you know what? The woman's father was waiting outside, you know who it was?"

- "No, who?" frowned Max.

- "Mr. Johnson."

- "Mr. Johnson, you mean, our teacher in psychology when we were in high school!?"

- "Yep."

- "No way! What did he say!? He wasn't too disappointed to be saved by a girl!?" joked Max.

- "I don't think he recognized me, he just asked me how his daughter was before running inside."

- "You didn't talk to him?"

- "No, I had nothing to tell him."

- "Well, if I was there, he would have heard me!"

- "I've no doubt of that," chuckled Jane.

Max finished her sauce before turning to Jane and kissing her.

- "I'm proud of you," whispered the redhead.

Jane's smile grew before kissing again Max. Even if Max would be worried all her life because of her work, she didn't want Jane to do another one, knowing she was born for it. And after Somalia, she couldn't let her give up because of this, she suffered too much to just have a job.

50. Ceremony

Max was standing next to Moussa and Gabrielle. They were surrounded by militaries wearing their uniforms, facing a scene with Lucas, Jane, and some other persons on it. The chief of the Army was making a speech to explain why these people deserved a medal.

- "I'm glad he didn't give too much details on what happened," murmured Max.

- "I think Sinclair told him to not to," whispered Gabrielle.

- "It's better like that, too many people know about it," added Moussa with his voice down.

The two girls agreed. Max tried to keep smiling, trying to encourage Jane, but the girl was looking down, waiting for this to end. She had her hands on her back, not wanting the others to see her shake. The chief announced the persons chosen to give the medals. Beverly proposed herself for Lucas and Jane, wanting to thank them in her own way. She began with Lucas. The black man had a big smile on his face, but she could see he was a bit stressing.

- "It's gonna be okay," murmured Bev while placing the medal on his chest at the level of his heart.

- "I hope," smiled Lucas.

The redhead kissed his cheek before taking him in her arms. Lucas tightened the hug with his left arm under the proud eyes of his girlfriend and friends. Bev broke the hug with a big smile for him, before stepping aside to face Jane now. The brunette was looking down, thinking she didn't deserve a medal; after all, she didn't do much. Bev leaned to catch her eyes and tried to cheer her up with a smile. Jane had a weak smile, that faded, but looked up. The redhead placed the medal on the uniform before putting her hands on her cheeks and wiping the tear which was falling.

- "I wouldn't be here without any of you," told Bev. "I know you won't keep it."

Jane lightly nodded. Bev kissed her cheek before wrapping her arms around her. Jane was shy, but still hugged her too.

- "She is shaking," pouted Max.

- "Of course she is, it's still hard for them," told Gabrielle.

- "I know."

When the chief of the Army finished his speech and let them leave the scene, Max wasn't surprised to see Jane taking off her medal. The redhead joined her in the crowd, Jane still looking down.

- "You're okay?" asked Max.

- "Yeah. (holds out the medal) Here, you're the one who should have a medal for everything you had done when I came back."

- "What? No, Jane, I can't, it's yours."

- "I don't want a medal if you don't have one too. Keep it, please. You deserve it more than me."

- "I don't know what to say, (takes it) thank you!"

- "Don't thank me, I thank you."

Max felt happy tears coming in her eyes; she was so touched by Jane's words. She put her head on her girlfriend's shoulder before wrapping her arms around her. She felt Jane's shaking arms tightening her, warming her heart.

- "I love you," sniffed Max.

- "I love you too."

Max broke the hug and kissed her multiple times before wiping her eyes. Jane grabbed her hand and began to walk with her in direction of Gabrielle who was alone.

- "She gave you her medal! So cute, I'm sure Sinclair is going to keep his," joked the black-haired girl.

- "You'll have better, don't worry," smiled the redhead.

- "Better than a medal? You mean, a gold bar!?"

- "What else!" chuckled Jane.

Gabrielle playfully rolled her eyes while Max and Jane were chuckling. They saw Bev and Moussa arrive, helping Lucas who had his right leg bended.

- "Why is your leg like that?" frowned Gabrielle.

- "Well, it's been a while we've been together, and we got through hard moments, especially because of me, but you're still here with me, and I still think you're not real, you're a just in my mind, because someone this perfect staying with me is miraculous," began Lucas. "(Jane and Max went of each side of the boy to hold his arms and help him to put his right knee on the floor) Would you do me the honor to become my wife?" asked the black boy, holding out a ring.

Gabrielle put her hands on her mouth to hide her surprised expression, while her eyes were wide opened.

- "Is this real!?"

- "More than real."

- "Of course, I want! Yes! Yes! That's a big yes! Million yes!"

Jane and Max helped him to stand, Moussa and Bev placing the right leg correctly, while everyone around was applauding them. Once ready, Gabrielle took her future husband in her arms for a long kiss.

- "You would have asked me in marriage if we could?" asked Max, applauding.

- "You already have my medal, that's enough," joked Jane.

- "Pff, you're stupid, I was serious!"

- "Well, I don't want to look like straight couples!"

- "Okay, I get it, you wouldn't have."

- "I would have, but I can't, so, I prefer not thinking about it."

Max had a sad smile and rubbed Jane's back. She knew Jane was still mad after the world to not be allowed to live like everyone else. Gabrielle appeared and took the two girls in her arms before breaking it and telling:

- "This is so much better than a medal!"

- "'Told you," smiled Max.

- "You'll have so much to do!"

- "What?" frowned Jane.

- "You thought I wouldn't choose my two favorites lesbians as my maids of honor!?"

- "We stupidly thought that, yes."

- "Well, you thought wrong! But if you don't want I would understand."

- "Don't be stupid, we accept!" told Max.

- "Great! Bev accepted too!"

The black-haired girl kissed their cheeks before joining Sinclair and Moussa while Bev was arriving near the two girls.

- "I'll have to wear a dress," stated Jane with horror.

- "You look great in dress," said Max.

- "I know, but I don't like wearing dresses."

- "For one day, it's not impossible, right?" smiled Bev.

- "I guess. Damn, we'll have to go shopping!"

- "Okay, take a breath, Jane, we won't do it today!" chuckled Max.

- "I hope, I'm not ready for that!"

The two redheads chuckled and playfully shook their heads. They joined Lucas and Gabrielle to congratulate them before leaving the place to celebrate it at the restaurant. After everything they bore, they deserved this happiness waiting for them.

51. Shopping

Lucas and Gabrielle decided to celebrate their wedding during Summer to enjoy the warm weather and the sun, giving some time for them to prepare everything. It was the beginning of Winter, but Max thought it was the good moment to begin to do shopping for the wedding, as Summer clothes were in sales. Gabrielle chose a dress for them for the ceremony, but for the party after they could wear what they wanted, which relieved Jane, not liking wearing dresses. They went in the first shop and looked around before trying some clothes.

- "You really wanna wear jeans for a wedding?" frowned Max.

- "They're black, no one will notice it's jeans," answered Jane.

- "..."

- "..."

- "..."

- "Okay, no jeans, I'll try the other pants."

- "Good idea."

Jane closed the curtain before wearing another pair of pants, still black.

- "Hey, I like this one!" said Max.

- "Yeah? You don't think it made me a big ass?"

- "Yeah, a big sexy ass!"

- "If you say so. I try the others, just to be sure?"

- "Yeah, why not, you love so much trying clothes that stopping you here would be a crime!" joked the redhead.

- "Yeah, whouhou!" answered Jane with a fake enthusiasm.

Max chuckled while Jane disappeared again behind this curtain. She tried three more pants before giving up and choosing the black ones. At least with Jane it was fast; she hated so much trying clothes that the first one good on her was perfect. Now, they could focus on Max, not fan of shopping either, but not as much as Jane. And Jane preferred looking for Max than herself.

- "This?" proposed Jane, showing a silver top.
- "Well, if we were in the seventies, why not, but..."
- "Don't insult my top like that! You could upset it!"
- "Yeah, sorry, I didn't wanna say that," joked Max. "I'm sorry silver top, but you look too old and I begin to worry about my girlfriend's tastes."
- "Yeah, you should, don't forget that I love you!"
- "That's why I'm worried."

The two girls chuckled before searching again. After half an hour, Max finally found the perfect outfit for the wedding party, relieving Jane, and allowing them to stop doing shopping.

- "So, where do you wanna eat?" asked Max, holding the shopping bags.
- "It's been a long time I didn't eat a burrito," said the brunette.
- "Then, let's eat those burritos!"

They bought their food and sat on a bench in the mall, facing a fountain.

- "Lucas invited Troy," said Jane.
- "Really? I didn't know they were friends!"
- "Yeah, I don't think they're really friends but he saw that he changed, and maybe he wants to give him a chance, I don't know, but I think it's really nice."

- "Yeah, really, you totally transformed this guy!" stated the redhead.
- "Nah, he was already like that, he just didn't find people to let him be himself."
- "Until you. Like with Abigail."
- "Yeah, it's kinda that. But, I never thought one second that Abigail could become my friend."
- "So did I! I still can't believe it, years ago I would have punched her in her face, but, instead, I let her sleep in the room next to mine."
- "Yeah, she appeared at the right moment, I guess."
- "I guess too, she had been really useful at home when you were sick, and she changed too, it's nice. You didn't bring her back at home just to bother me, but because you saw she changed, and I'm glad you did."
- "I'm glad too, she is happy now."

Max nodded. It was true that Abigail was happy now, it was good to see.

The two girls finished their meal before standing and wandering in the mall, holding each other's hands. Max was looking at the shops around, wondering if something could be useful for the wedding or something like that but no, the shops were not for weddings. She saw a new video game in a window display and let go Jane's hand to have a better view. It was Sonic & Knuckles; the game released around a month or two ago, but the girl didn't have the time to buy it yet. Maybe later, or maybe someone bought it for her for Christmas, it wasn't the right period to buy things.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Max quickly crouched with her hands on her head like if it could protect her. Those who were not hiding were running everywhere and screaming, trying to be as far as possible from the shooter. The redhead turned her head to Jane but...

- "Oh no, (stands and runs to her) no, no, no, no, no! (crouches next to Jane's body on the floor, covered of her own blood) Jane, Jane! (places her hands on the holes, trying to press the wounds) Jane, stay with me!"

The brunette had her eyes opened but was struggling to breath. She was getting colder and colder and knew what it meant.

- "Max..."

- "No, no! Don't say it! You're not gonna die! I won't let you die! PLEASE! SOMEONE! SHE NEEDS HELP!"

Jane moved her weak hand and managed to caress Max's cheek, catching her attention.

- "You're beautiful," said Jane.

- "Don't say that," told Max with tears in her eyes and her throat tightening. "Don't leave me...You can't leave me...I need you..."

- "I'm sorry..."

- "No, Jane, don't...Please, you have to fight, please..."

Max's hands were sinking in the blood which wasn't stopping flowing. Jane was becoming paler. Max felt a horrible pain in her heart and stomach, knowing it would never leave her. Her heart was tensing so much that she thought it was going to stop. Everything was blurry because of her tears. Nothing made sense. It wasn't true; it couldn't be true. She kept pressuring but she couldn't see her hands anymore. Why nobody was helping them!? They were all killing her by their cowardice.

- "I love you..." told weakly Jane.

- "I love you too..." cried Max.

The redhead knew there was nothing to do. She leaned to her, kissed her before placing her forehead against hers. She couldn't believe what was happening. She couldn't move or let go Jane, thinking it was keeping her alive. But it wasn't.

52. Cremation

Max learned what happened only the day after. Daniel followed her the entire day, waiting for the right moment to shoot. He claimed that his brother committed suicide four years ago because of her, and since this day, his goal was to take his revenge, no matter what. His brother was none other than Alban. She couldn't believe it; it was like if this family was born to ruin people's lives. At least, he was arrested this time, he couldn't hurt anyone anymore. Even if she would have preferred him to suffer more, like he deserved.

Everyone was here: Mike, Will, James, Joyce, Dustin, Suzie, Lucas, Gabrielle, Moussa, Beverly, Troy, Juan, Abigail, and more. The police station insisted to make an official ceremony for Jane. Moussa, Lucas, Troy, Dustin, Will, and Mike decided to hold the coffin while her ex-colleagues of the police station were forming a guard of honor, wearing their uniforms, and doing the military salute before shooting at the sky, like a last goodbye. They placed the coffin in the crematorium, where only the close family could stay. Max was there with Jane's cousins, Moussa, and the others. No other members of her family travelled for the ceremony, and Max was glad they didn't; she wouldn't have let them stay anyway.

The group stayed silent while the cremation; all lost in their thoughts, thinking of all the memories they had with Jane: the first day they met her, when they learned she was lesbian, or even when they learned for Max and her. It was so unexpected. All of this was over now.

Abigail was certainly the one who cried the most, by guilt or by pain, Max would never know.

Max kept the urn with her, not knowing if she should throw the ashes or keep them. For now, she wanted to keep them. She didn't organize a meal after, just wanting to end this rapidly. She hugged all of them but didn't cry. She was certainly empty now; she kept crying again and again for days.

She arrived at the apartment. She never realized how wide it was, and calm. Too calm. She closed the door and saw the pictures on the

wall on her left; she had a weak and nostalgic smile when she saw the last one they put, when they went in California.

She began to feel tears coming so she kept walking, holding tight the urn. But she saw the couch and remembered the moment when Jane told her she was her favorite pillow to sleep with; she blushed so much that she thought she would be red her entire life.

She kept walking and saw her kitchen, with the small hope to see Jane waiting for her at their table. But no one was there.

She slowly opened her corridor door and kept walking, not looking at the bathrooms on her left. She arrived at the end of the corridor, between their two doors. She didn't open their bedroom, not ready. Instead, she opened Jane's bedroom-study and felt her heart stopping and struggled to hold her tears. It was still smelling like her. She entered, looking around. She saw her headphones with her Walkman on the desk and decided to take it. The first day she met her, she was listening to music on the benches before basketball. She sat under the desk, her knees against her chest, the urn in her arms, and put the headphones on her ears before turning off the machine. It was Sex Pistols, Jane's favorite band. Max couldn't hold it anymore; she began to sob, hiding her face in her knees, hoping it was just a dream.

The redhead had a start. It was dark outside. She didn't realize she fell asleep while listening to Jane's music. She wiped her wet eyes and blew her nose before getting out of the desk. She placed again the Walkman on the desk before hearing meowing. She turned her head and saw Cat on the bed, laid down on Jane's pillow, next to her leather jacket, calling for his mother.

- "Oh, Cat, you miss her too..."

Max sat next to him and petted him before grabbing the leather jacket. She plunged her face in it and took a deep breath to smell Jane one last time, again and again, before crying in it. She wanted to hold her so much, but she couldn't. She wanted to hear her laugh, but she wouldn't. She wanted to hold her hand, but it was impossible now. She would give everything to have the traumatized Jane with her, just to not be alone. She spent months to be her ghost, but she never thought it would be Jane, the real ghost.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hi! This is the official end, but there is another end after this one, you choose the one you prefer ;)

53. Hospital

Notes for the Chapter:

This is the alternate end :)

The redhead was walking quickly in the white halls of the hospital. The ambulance miraculously made beat Jane's heart again. She couldn't believe it; it was so unbelievable! She lost so much blood that Max was wondering if she would wake up. But, at least, she was alive.

She arrived in the room. It was quiet, with only the beeps of the machines. Jane was laying down, her eyes closed. She could breath by herself now, which was a good thing. After three weeks in the coma, things were getting better. They arrested Daniel who would spend his entire life in jail, far from Jane. She couldn't believe he was Alban's brother and was doing all of this to take revenge of his brother's suicide four years ago. She sat next to her, as usual, and began to tell her her day, hoping she could hear her from where she was.

Something moved. Max stood, looking closely at her girlfriend's face. She was trying to open her eyes. The redhead called a doctor before going back near the brunette.

- "Jane, Jane! Can you hear me!?"

Jane mumbled some inaudible things.

- "You're here! You're alive!" stated the redhead with tears in her eyes.

- "Why wouldn't I?" asked Jane, opening her eyes with difficulties.

- "The doctor will tell you."

- "The doctor!? (straightens) Where the fuck am I!? In hospital!?"

- "Daniel shot you, you don't remember?"

- "Uuuuh...It's blurry...Oh! We were doing shopping!"

- "Yeah! Indeed! I'm so happy to see you!"

- "I always told you that shopping would kill me!" joked the brunette with a serious tone.

The redhead chuckled, letting fall some tears, before leaning to kiss her girlfriend. The doctor entered and examined the girl.

- "Can you feel here?" asked the man.

Jane frowned before sitting and looking at her feet. She shook her head to say no, feeling her heart racing and an awful sensation in her stomach.

- "Can you move your feet?"

Jane shook again her head to say no. The doctor continued along her legs to know the extent of the paralysis.

- "Well, that's what we were fearing. One of the bullets got through your spinal column and damaged your nerves."

- "I won't be able to walk again at all!?" asked Jane with an angry tone.

- "Your chances are negligible."

- "But, there are still chances, right?" told Max.

- "We have a good center of reeducation; she will have to follow a program. I let you some time to think about it."

The doctor left the room, letting the two girls alone.

- "Are you okay?" asked Max.

- "I fucking can't walk anymore! How do you think I am!?" replied angrily Jane.

- "Jane, no..."

- "What!? I can't do anything anymore! I don't wanna hear you tell me that everything will be okay because it's not true! I won't walk ever again!"

- "Maybe the reeducation-"

- "What reeducation!? My chances are negligible! It's already a waste of time! You know no shit about this! I would have preferred being killed than living this! FUCK!"

- "Jane..."

- "NO! SHUT UP! YOU SHUT THE FUCK UP! YOU STILL CAN WALK AND I CAN'T!"

Max felt her heart stopping. It was like before, again. She would be a ghost again, wandering in her own apartment while Jane would totally ignore her again. She didn't know if she could do it again; it was too hard. She couldn't let that happen. She grabbed Jane's face and got closer to her.

- "Yeah, I got it, you lost your legs, but I know you, you're strong, determined, I know you'll go to this reeducation, doing your best, seeing all the progress you're going to make, just because you won't walk like before doesn't mean you can't make any progress. I won't let you become like before, you were awful and odious, detestable, and I don't wanna live that again, I don't know if I'm capable to live that again. It's hard to swallow, for both of us, even if I still can walk, seeing you like will be hard for me too. This is unfair, you don't deserve it, but we will make it, because I love you and I know you love me too, even if for now, you don't feel anything else than hate, anger, pain, and sadness. I'll stay with you, no matter what, but, please, don't become like before, I'm tired to be a ghost."

- "I can't walk anymore..." told Jane with tears in her eyes.

- "I know, I'm sorry..." said Max, feeling her throat tightening.

Jane didn't try to hold her tears. Max wrapped her arms around her girlfriend's head and held it close to her body, trying to comfort her broken girlfriend. It was another obstacle, but the girls would pass

through it, like they did after Somalia, like they always did when they had a problem. Max didn't know how they would do it, or if it would work, but she wasn't going to let Jane down, she knew she could do it.

- "I don't wanna be like that again..." sobbed Jane.

- "You won't, I know that."

- "I don't wanna hurt you..."

- "You won't, Jane, it's okay, don't worry, you'll be fine. I promise."

Max kept rubbing her girlfriend's back, hoping it would make her feel better. Jane managed to calm down, feeling completely empty. She was scared and more than disappointed. She couldn't be a cop anymore because of this asshole and she would have to live in a wheelchair for her entire life, it would be so hard, even for Max. She was going to be dependent of Max! Jane was sure she wouldn't support this, being dependent was the worst thing for her. Max broke the hug and sat next to her.

- "It's gonna be hard," said the redhead.

- "I know."

Max grabbed her hand and squeezed it.

- "I love you," told the redhead.

- "I love you too."

The two girls stayed together, swallowing this bad news. They stayed quiet, lost in their thoughts, scared of their futures. At least, they had a future, together, counting on each other.

Notes for the Chapter:

This time, there is no chapter anymore! I hope you liked this story! (don't hesitate to tell me which end you chose ;))

See you in another book :D